

THE REVENUES

OF

THE WICKED

BY WALTER RAYMOND

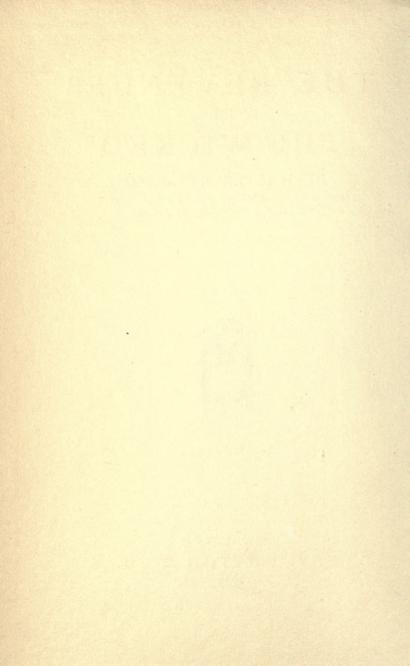
Author of "Tryphena in Love" "Young Sam and Sabina" "The Book of Simple Delights," &c., &c.



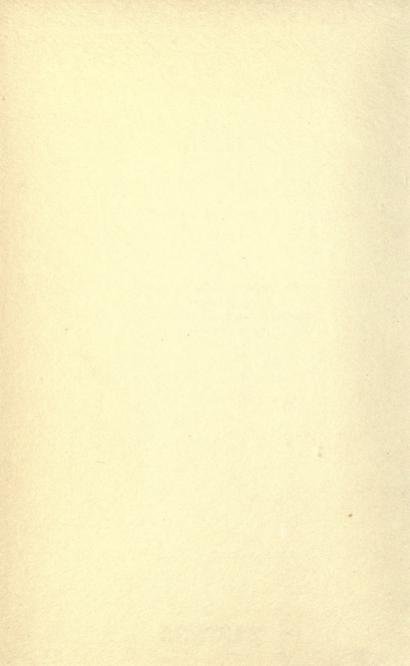
NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & CO.

1912



In the house of the righteous is much treasure:
But in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. *Proverbs* xv, 6.

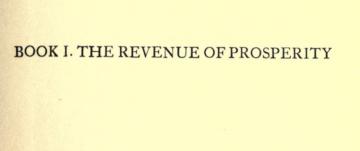


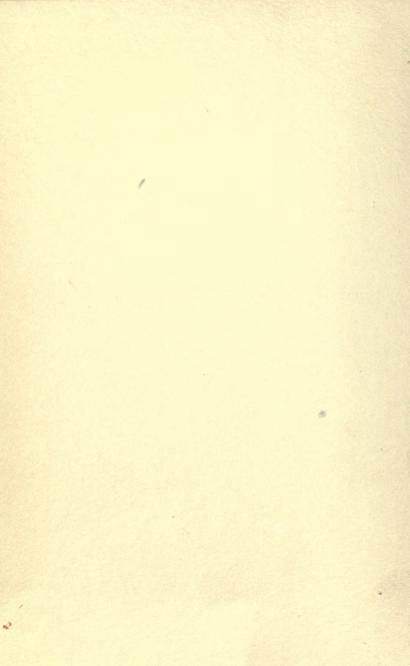
CONTENTS

| B | SOOK I: THE REVENUE OF | · I | ROS | PE | RIT | Y | | |
|---|------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----|---|---|-------|
| | Chapter I | | | | | | | Page |
| | Hatchbarrow | | | | | | | 3 |
| | Chapter II | | | | | | | |
| | Shearing | | | | | | | II |
| | Chapter III | | | | | | | |
| | The Beacon Head . | | | | | | | 26 |
| | Chapter IV | | | | | | | |
| | The Party | | | | | | | 41 |
| | Chapter V | | | | | | | |
| | Sweet Moonlight . | | | | | | | 64 |
| | Chapter VI | | | | | | | |
| | The End of the Party | | | | | | | 69 |
| | Chapter VII | | | | | | | |
| | John and Jane | | | | | | | 73 |
| BOOK II. RETROSPECTION | | | | | | | | |
| | Chapter I | | | | | | | |
| | Retrospection | | | | | | | 83 |
| BOOK III. THE REVENUE OF DOUBTS AND FEARS | | | | | | | | |
| | Chapter I | - | | | | | | 21110 |
| | Thomasine's Diplomacy | 7 | | | | | | 125 |
| | - Promisoj | | • | | | • | • | -43 |

CONTENTS

| Chapter II Deep Soundings | | | | | | | 136 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|----|--|--|--|--|-----|--|--|--|
| Chapter III To Netherton-Town . | | | | | | | 149 | | | |
| Chapter IV What Philip had to Tel | 1 | | | | | | 169 | | | |
| Chapter V Thomasine's Return | | | | | | | 172 | | | |
| BOOK IV. THE REVENUE OF TROUBLE | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chapter I | | | | | | | | | | |
| Confessions | | | | | | | 181 | | | |
| Chapter II | | | | | | | | | | |
| The Decision | | | | | | | 198 | | | |
| Chapter III | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thomasine Tells | | | | | | | 207 | | | |
| Chapter IV | | | | | | | | | | |
| The Surprise | | | | | | | 218 | | | |
| Chapter V | | | | | | | | | | |
| Discomfiture | | -, | | | | | 229 | | | |
| Chapter VI | | | | | | | | | | |
| Humiliation | | | | | | | 237 | | | |
| Chapter VII | | | | | | | | | | |
| Once More the Hearth | | | | | | | 243 | | | |
| EPILOGUE | | | | | | | 249 | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | |





The Revenues of the Wicked

CHAPTER I

HATCHBARROW

An evening in early June.

The sun hung in the sky above a rift in the horizon, a wood-clad chasm, through which a hidden river rushes down its valley between two moors. The west was all aglow—so golden, so resplendent, that the distant moorland below it, fast darkening into shadow, had put on a robe of purple, richer, deeper and more sumptuous than the flower of the heather yet to come.

In those days you might have crossed Eddyford Common fifty times without chancing upon any human soul. You might almost do the same today. And yet on that summer afternoon, as cousin Jane Peters of Eddyford subsequently affirmed, the whole country "did seem alive wi' folk." Cousin Jane Peters had never in all her life seen such a sight of folk not all to one minute—not outside of a town, of course. From all sides people were coming; and when cousin Jane Peters afterwards counted them up on her fingers, she could swear to ten at the very least. Well, she waited for two and walked on in

their company. She did not wait for the others because "'twas mostly a pa'cel o' giddy maidens" and the rest were more than a mile off. Under such circumstances it was not to be expected. She waited for Peter Jay, the parish clerk, because he was a staid man and short of breath. Perspiration, ready and profuse, was the boast of cousin Jane Peters, and on the way to a party, and dressed a little heavy for the season, she was not going to walk herself into a bath o' sweat. Not likely. And she waited for uncle Ieremiah Brook, as of course anybody would-he such a great age, in his long white beard so handsome as Moses in a picture Bible. Besides, uncle Jeremiah Brook was lonely in life and with money to leave. Thus he was worthy of both sympathy and respect. So, one behind the other along the uneven track, they all three walked on their way to Hatchbarrow very comfortably together.

Cousin Jane Peters was an ample middle-aged spinster in a coal-scuttle bonnet which almost hid her comely but rather commonplace face, and a gown which was really a springtime of bright flowers.

Peter Jay, except that no cascade of black crêpe "weepers" dropped over his back, was dressed for a funeral, as was usual on any occasion of festivity.

At his age uncle Jeremiah Brook did not waste money on new clothes. His cloth gaiters were sadly in creases. His jacket was rusty upon the shoulders. His beaver hat showed slight but unmistakable symptoms of mange. Uncle Jeremiah Brook had no need of vain show with his beard and intellect.

All the world was for Hatchbarrow.

As we also have to get to Hatchbarrow we are lucky to fall in with three wayfarers so conversant with that household and so competent to show us the way.

"I must speak," said uncle Jeremiah Brook, whom great age and wisdom were for ever compelling to adverse criticism. "Of all God-forsaken places in creation, Hatchbarrow do, to my mind, stand the most alone."

"And yet always look pleasant," smiled cousin Jane Peters, who always looked pleasant herself when on the way to a party.

"In summer—do. An' in winter—so pleasant

as can," agreed Peter Jay.

"An' though so lonesome like—no place more in sight. For mount any hill for miles an' look about, in the right direction to be sure—there is Hatchbarrow."

"So 'tis."

"An' so certain, that when you be out o' sight in a coombe or a valley, you do seem to know he's there."

"Now don't 'ee?" reflected Peter Jay.

"You do. But mind John Scutt do keep the house so constant whited."

"Keep a house whited, so I've a-heard tell, and for witch or devil'tis the go-by," said the parish clerk.

"I must speak. If there is any witching o' Hatchbarrow must be from inside. If the devil do ever go there, John Scutt must ha' squared un somehow."

"Oh! he've a-squared un for certain," said Peter Jay, who not being a relative had no need to knuckle down to uncle Jeremiah Brook's bit of money. "He've a-squared the devil the only way there is. John Scutt do work hard an' act straight, a upright honest man. And so anybody in this parish can tell 'ee."

"I must speak," repeated uncle Jeremiah Brook severely, because, after all, Peter Jay could not be called a man of property. "You do show heat, Peter Jay—uncalled for."

"An' how beautiful Tamsin really do keep the front wi' her flowers," interposed cousin Jane Peters.

"An' the early roses over the porch an' all."

"Now, there, 'pon my word, I must speak." Uncle Jeremiah Brook showed unmistakable warmth himself this time. "As to Tamsin, to my mind, both John Scutt and Jane do not only talk weak but act foolish."

By this time they were all hot—cousin Jane Peters perspiring, Peter panting and uncle Jeremiah Brook burning with indignation. So they came to a stop on the hill and mopped their brows as they looked at Hatchbarrow.

Standing alone on a hill-side facing the south, remote from the village of Eddyford, to which parish

it belonged, with no other dwelling in sight, the homestead at Hatchbarrow looked out upon a billowy waste, and was solitary as a ship at sea. Yet at this time of the year, in spite of large black patches where the heather had been burnt, the moorland was not sad, but green with the freshness of young bracken and spangled with clumps of flowering gorse.

The sunlight had passed from the front of the house, it is true, but it still shone on the "pointingend," on one wall of the great porch, on the sides of the chimneys and projecting dormers. It gently marked homely and unsuspected undulations of the thatch on barn and shed—subtle lines and curves not to be distinguished under cloud or in broad day. The single window in the gable, the only one that could catch a gleam of the sun, glistened like a gem. Also the trees, which sheltered this group of buildings on every side except the front, like a hood around a human face, caught something of the transitory splendour. Mostly beech, on their leaves still lingered a memory of the glossy freshness of spring. But intermingled were ancient weatherbeaten firs with bare stems erect and straight. High enough to catch the glance of the sunset, their twisted weather-beaten limbs stood out red and grev from the masses of dark foliage, bright as glowing logs, from which the flame had departed, against a black chimney at the back of a farmhouse hearth. And close around the homestead was the farmcorn grounds and fields of grass, enclosed by high banks walled with a primitive open masonry, mosscovered and shadowed by tall overhanging beech hedges. The wheat was green. Fields as yet uncropped, but tilled as fine as garden soil, were red. The grass was growing for the scythe. This patch of cultivated land was like an island of plenty in a broad ocean of moor and waste.

Such is the picture of Hatchbarrow seen about a hundred years ago on that evening early in June, at the moment when these three philosophers stood and gazed at it.

"Well! What a place is to your own mind—so 'tis," said cousin Jane Peters with unconscious pro-

fundity.

"An' the Creator of all had no need to bestow every gift 'pon one spot. He did not stint room for His works. Any man wi' one eye can see that."

"An' the heart is neither sad nor lonesome where

there's work."

"Ah! Now what did I say?" Peter Jay raised a hand to demand attention. "When the small-pox were so bad in parish an' folk did come wi' Peter, you must find it terr'ble sad so much diggen,' an' what did I tell 'em? 'Pity a poor sexton,' said I 'what can't nourish his heart wi' sadness while so busy.'"

"I must speak," said uncle Jeremiah Brook. "If 'tis your meaning that I be a one-eyed man or lazy, your words be water 'pon a duck's back."

"How your uncle do quacky," said Peter Jay. Happily at that moment other wayfarers came up.

Young girls from the village on foot and clad in holiday white came laughing along the winding road which in some places was little better than a rutty track. And others had come into the landscape whom cousin Iane Peters had not seen in the first place. Maidens and matrons on horseback picking a way between the bright green bog and the brown heather, they came from outlying farms on diverse mounts, rough ponies and bony old mares from the plough, with the company frock in a parcel tied to the saddle in front. What matter, so long as they got there? Pride there was, no doubt, but no room for a paltry pride amongst these moorland folk. varieties of mankind were divided, clear to sense as land and water. There were gentle and simple. One man saved and grew rich, another wasted and became poor. That made no difference. Neither could the Rubicon be crossed by the one, nor the latter drop sifted through misfortune's sieve. more or less kin, there was no labouring class. richest laboured in the fields, and the women also at the hay and the harvest. He who took a wage earned it of his neighbour and remained none the less a friend.

Now and then a two-wheeled cart, with some old "gramfer," came jolting over the ruts, but travellers more bent on mirth you never could see. They hailed each other, and laughed and shouted time-honoured jokes across the ancient moor.

10 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

They were hastening to John Scutt's sheepshearing party. And why this wonder to see the moorland suddenly peopled with old men and women folk? Have you not heard that they were sheepshearing at Hatchbarrow? So the young men were already there.

When they reached the house, Peter Jay and uncle Jeremiah Brook, choosing the coolest and most satisfactory place to assuage their thirst, strolled out into the barton to watch the shearers at work.

CHAPTER II

SHEARING

THE barton—that square enclosure bounded by the garden, the cowstalls, the stables and the barn, which townspeople generally call the farmyard—was merry with the sound of voices mingled with the bleating of sheep.

To any stranger coming to Hatchbarrow the

barton was worth a glance.

The outbuildings, although sound by reason of the thickness of their walls, were ancient and weather-beaten. They presented a striking contrast to the comfortable appearance of the well-kept white-washed house. The stone of which they were built was of a rich brown mottled with greys, and the roofs were of many colours, from the pale yellow of last season's reed to the sombre hues of a crumbling thatch, sodden by many a winter's rain and half hidden under bright green moss and patches of houseleek. The cowstalls, empty at this time of the year, were supported by round stone pillars. The great barn was buttressed, and a gable, sheltering a shattered pigeon-box under its eaves, projected from the roof and crowned with a certain dignity its

lofty doors. Its crumbling stones were plentifully enriched with lichen. Ferns and pennywort were everywhere growing out of the chinks. And on the other side of a low wall rose two great stacks of purple beech faggots, another of rich brown turf cut on the moor for winter firing, and a double row of golden mows of wheat and oats. The whole place was a feast of colour if there had been eyes to see it. To the eyes of the moorland folk the buildings wanted repairs. The stacks were interesting merely as to number and size.

And yet, so wonderful the unsuspected influences which direct and misdirect the currents of human life, the mysterious spirit of beauty, residing in nooks and corners and lurking under the eaves of these decaying buildings, lay at the beginning of the story which was to work its fulfilment before the wool of this shearing should have time to reach the hands of the weavers.

This evening the great barn doors were open. From within came a sound of clipping, but the work was just drawing to a close. Over a thin layer of straw a winnowing-sheet had been spread on the barn's floor, for such was the plan for the shearing at Hatchbarrow, and still in the dim of the building prostrate ewes and kneeling men might have been seen. But the last of the flock had been taken. As he finished his sheep each shearer stood upright, stretched his limbs and took a deep breath of fresh air.

"There you be then, Mr. John Scutt."

"Aye, there you be, John Scutt."

Thus, one after another, each signified that the job was done. Very quickly a various group of young and middle-aged, though all in duck once white but now dirty and yelk-stained, gathered around a stout thick-set man of less than middle height and drawing towards three score years of age, who stood by the barn's door just off the winnowing-sheet.

"There you be then, Mr. John Scutt."

His shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows left bare a pair of hairy muscular arms hard and brown as oak. The short fingers of his left hand clutched an almost empty pitch-kettle. In the right he held an iron with which to place a brand upon his sheep. His face was square and his jaw deep. His eyebrows of a ruddy brown colour were straight and low, but so coarse and bristly that they projected like eaves above his grey eyes and prominent cheekbones. His hair was red, though scarcely of the violent hue that could give him a claim to be called "carroty-headed," and it was abundant. He had been too busy to shave for a couple of days. rusty stubble covered his chin and long upper lip and encroached far in upon his broad cheeks. So that in his ragged waistcoat, his old cord breeches creased and stained with pitch, his gaiters that here and there wanted a button, he was not altogether a prepossessing figure, and a stranger might have wondered at the rough deference paid him by those

around. For although the flock was his, the shearers were no hirelings, but neighbours from the village or the homesteads scattered far apart upon the moor. In those old days, of about a century ago, the work of the farm had not been severed from the social life of the neighbourhood. The harvest of the fleece was one of the jolliest seasons of the year. The party of shearers went from farm to farm, and each day's work was followed by a supper, after which dance and song did not cease until after daybreak.

All the clipping had ceased except from one pair

of shears.

"Come on, young Isaac. Bring her on. Hold fast a minute."

"There you be then, Mr. John Scutt."

"Just off the win-sheet! That's it," said he of the pitch-kettle in short, impatient sentences.

The young shearer dragged the ewe forward and

held her fast.

John Scutt set his mark—a large letter S with a perpendicular stroke through it—on her panting side.

The others watched in silence and intently, as though this familiar thing were new to them, as country people will. It took time, for the pitch was getting cold and scarcely enough. The iron was applied several times and still the mark was indistinct.

"There! That must do, young Isaac," cried the owner at last in a tone of discontent with a job not over neat.

Young Isaac released his hold. The ewe scampered, bleating, to rejoin the flock huddled in the further corner of the yard beside the gate, and John Scutt's shearing was at an end.

"So there's another lot done," cried the young Isaac, wiping his shears on the palm of his hand as he stepped into the middle of the group of neighbours.

The moorland men were mostly tall and straight. They came of a quicker, more nimble-minded race than their distant neighbours in the rich vales to the east of the hill country. Even to-day their speech bewrayeth them, and although their voices are often harsh their dialect retains the softer vowel sounds of the Celt. Toiling and struggling from daybreak to dark against bitter, snow-bound winters, and summers often wet, they lived a hard life. each other dry and rough, as the bark on the young oaks in the copses, strangers nevertheless remarked upon a natural courtesy quite pleasant to contemplate. They loved their country-understood it and nothing else. It was noticed that any who went away always did well. But few left. They were at home on the hills and the moorland with the ponies and the sheep.

As fine a show of stalwart youth as eyes could wish to rest upon stood in John Scutt's barton that evening, yet the young Isaac Cledworth outdid the tallest in height by at least two inches. He was thin but wiry and muscular, sandy-haired and freckled, with quick grey eyes having more fight

than kindness in them. Nature had bestowed on him a countenance of less distinction than the well-featured faces round him—a round head, rather small, and a short truculent nose. Yet young Isaac Cledworth was a celebrity, and both for cudgel-playing and wrestling his fame was known for half a dozen counties round. He had a way of shouting statements of universally accepted fact with an air of defying contradiction. And he paid marked deference to the man with the pitch-kettle and spoke his name in a lower and softer tone of voice.

"Ay! The biggest flock an' the best—that's Mr.

John Scutt's o' Hatchbarrow."

"And that's no lie," responded Peter Jay as solemnly as if he had been in church.

"And the heaviest shear this summer sheep for sheep—that's Mr. John Scutt's o' Hatchbarrow."

"An' that's gospel truth."

"An' I'll bet any man a guinea he can't ride half a mile anywhere, from one end to t'other o' Eddyford Common, but he'll meet wi' a big S wi' a skiver down his back—for that's Mr. John Scutt's o' Hatchbarrow."

"An' that's a solemn fac'."

A murmur of universal corroboration passed round the company, as if the congregation had suddenly aroused itself.

"A solemn fac'. So 'tis. A solemn fac'."

At the mention of his wealth, with a wave of the hand, as of a serious man impatient with the empty tattle of giddy-headed youth, Mr. John Scutt had stepped a little aside. He pulled a tuft of rough grass from the corner between an upping-stock and the garden wall, and stood wiping and rubbing stains of pitch from his fingers. For a reason known to himself the young Isaac was no favourite with him. But he hated any talk of his riches, and when the weight of the fleeces was spoken of he snorted a contemptuous "Pooh! Pooh!"

Suddenly he glanced back over his shoulder and asked sharply:

"Have 'ee found my sheep any too many for 'ee,

young Isaac Cledworth?"

The question had a double meaning. Big flock or little the shearing was done by neighbours without pay, and the only recompense was a liberal hospitality. The young man was most eager to disclaim any such meaning.

"Not a fleece, Mr. John Scutt."

"I thought maybe you did," was the reply, spoken in the short manner of one who intends to rebuke.

"I must speak," said uncle Jeremiah Brook. "I do not think any such thing was meant or intended."

With that the conversation would have closed had not the old Isaac Cledworth seen fit to put in a word or so in support of his son.

The old Isaac Cledworth was a little red-faced man with a wrinkled forehead below what is sometimes euphemistically called "a broad parting" that is to say, a highway of baldness, in his case passing between two rough hedgerows of unkempt grey hair. For the moment his complexion threatened apoplexy. This was not the result of excitement or the spirit of argument, but because the old Isaac Cledworth was doing his best, and that a poor one, to balance himself on one leg.

The old Isaac Cledworth was one of those restless spirits who must always be a-doing, always "a-projecking" and trying to think of some new dodge. A man, as the saying is, with a maggot in his brain. Most of the shearers had a change in the barn. The old Isaac Cledworth started of a morning ready in his second-best suit. In eager anticipation of the feast he was already divesting himself of a pair of duck trousers by dragging them over his hob-nailed boots—a precarious and unstable operation for any man who for hours has been bent two-double like a hinge, and has only managed to avoid permanent stiffness by the regular use of an internal lubrication, of which the active principle was malt. After all, a man is neither a barn-door fowl nor a parrot on a perch. And nothing will more enrich a man's complexion than a maggot in the skull, which has been encouraged and refreshed by frequent regular libations of home-brewed.

Below a pair of neat cord breeches with flat brass buttons at the knees, he at last discovered a pair of blue-grey worsted hose.

Such was the old Isaac Cledworth, a near neighbour to John Scutt, for, although his was a scattered holding, some of the fields adjoined the land of Hatchbarrow.

"No, no, Mr. John Scutt," cried he. "Don't you think that. Such a thought was never in the boy's mind. Work or skill, let every man get and hold so much as he can—that's my maxim. Some be luckier 'an some—or born wi' more headpiece—an' you be both o' it. For 'tis wonderful, an' so 'tis what you have a-bin able to do, an' all praise—"

He paused, for the second refractory trouser-leg parted unwillingly from the hobnails, stood upright

and added:

"An' all praise to 'ee for it, Mr. John Scutt."

This commendation, however, pleased John Scutt no better than the others. With growing impatience he threw his tuft of grass upon the ground. It had only added green to the pitch stains.

"Pooh! What I've a-got," said he, shortly,

" I've a-worked for an' put by."

Others of the company added each his humble contribution of wit and wisdom.

"We've all a-worked-more or less."

"I must speak. You ha'n't all put by."

"An' after all, bear in mind this. Mr. John Scutt have only had one to bring up."

"An' old Isaac here was so greedy of offspring.

How many was it, Isaac-a score an' one?"

"An' children when their bellies do pinch be like stock 'pon common when keep do run short. They do come home to door an' blarey."

20 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

"But look here. Old Isaac never laid out so much 'pon his score as Mr. John Scutt, by all accounts, have a-spended 'pon his one."

"But there is stock you do know that don't pay

a man for doing so extra well."

"An' Isaac is a very knowledgeable man."

"But Mr. John Scutt's Tamsin now—she—well, she——"

"I should dearly love to cast eyes 'pon the sweet pretty face o' Tamsin now," drawled Peter Jay.

At once arose a roar of laughter, and the company, one after another, began to call for "Tamsin." "Come on, Tamsin." "Where be Tamsin?" with such a boisterous hilarity that the old sheep-dog came out from behind the upping-stock and spoke, and the sheep huddled closer still into the corner.

The truth is for the twentieth time that afternoon Tamsin had been sent to the cellar. At the mention of her name the father of Tamsin cast aside his mood of impatience and joined his voice to this banter. Speaking always in his rough short manner, but now with a thorough good humour, his voice softened into a certain tone of apology—not for himself, of course, but for Tamsin.

"Well, where can our Tamsin have got to? I tell 'ee what 'tis, neighbours. As one o' 'ee said just now, when the keep do run short on common all your stock'll come up to gate an' blarey. You be dry, so, like the bullocks, you do cast eyes across

to door an' blarey. But where is Tamsin? Tamsin! 'Tis a fresh cask, neighbours. I reckon the tap is slow to run. For our Tamsin is no slug by nature. Tamsin! Oh! Here she is, then. Here is our Tamsin.''

As he spoke a girl of about twenty came out of the homestead porch and along the garden path towards the gate. From her neck to below her skirt she was covered in a "pinny" of light blue that hung as straight as a smock. But the sleeves were short, leaving her arms bare from above the elbow. She moved slowly, taking short and careful steps, for she carried a large vessel, holding it before her with both hands. It was of the shape of a jug but built of oaken staves and banded like a tub or a bucket. As well as a handle it had a wooden lip for pouring, by which Tamsin steadied it, her eyes intently watching all the while, for such a mountain of froth rose above the brim that she could not see the liquor.

Young Isaac ran to open the gate.

"Let me take it," said he as she passed through.

"I can carry it well enough myself, thank you," replied Tamsin without stopping.

At this the shearers laughed.

"That's the go-by for you, young Isaac."

"Tamsin-why, she wouldn't look at Isaac."

"Not likely. Tamsin's a lady."

"An' do visit wi' the gentry."

22 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

"But that's nothing but right in the bad weather. Tamsin being so delicate like."

"An' her father next kin to a squire, by all

accounts."

"I must speak," said uncle Jeremiah Brook.

"At such a time this is uncalled for."

Then they all laughed again. The banter of Eddyford was unrestrained but good-humoured.

The girl, perhaps conscious of being suspected of now and then giving herself airs, blushed and looked vexed. But old Isaac Cledworth, with a wink to the rest, stepped forward and met her half-way between the garden-hatch and the barn.

"Let's have it, Tamsin, my child," he coaxed.

Glad at heart to be relieved, Tamsin gave it up with a smile, whereat the shearers laughed the louder and the face of young Isaac fell as dark as a thunder-cloud. But nobody had time to take note of that. Peter Jay had already run to fetch the drinking-horns from the barn. They closed around the old Isaac and watched and waited their turns whilst, with respectful care, he poured out the strongest of the Hatchbarrow brew.

"Don't be long, father. Everything is ready, and for certain everybody has come. You'll find a pat of butter in the back-house to get off the pitch. I've put your things on the bed. And mother will carry up your hot water to shave. Make haste, all of you. And to save time I'll go and turn out the sheep."

The voice of Tamsin was low and musical. Her speech betrayed scarcely a trace of dialect, only the gentle modulation that even to-day makes some simple, old-fashioned utterance as pleasant as a song.

"That's right, Tamsin," cried old Isaac Cledworth merrily. "Keep your father up to your mark. See

to it he do get the good o' your schoolen."
"Oh, ay, neighbour," agreed Mr. John Scutt, now thoroughly delighted with the old Isaac's "Our Tamsin do keep an eve 'pon father. Do this. Leave off that. 'Nother shirt. Clean collar. I must do as I be bid." Then he glanced at Tamsin with pride. "Get on, then," he said, with an assumed air of reluctant yielding to the whim of a spoilt child.

The girl fetched from the shed a rough moorland pony, ready saddled, and led him by the bridle to the stone upping-stock. The wise-looking old sheep-dog, who had just now slunk back to his nook when he found the noise was only frivolity, hearing the sound of hoofs, came out of his corner. This time it was business. He stood ready, slowly wagging his tail. She mounted the steps, and, without the security of a pommel or even troubling to place her foot in the stirrup, sat erect and at home, whilst the little horse tossed his head with pride to find her on his back.

Her father strode across the barton before them, opened the gate and turned the sheep into a short lane leading to the common.

24 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

The shearers stood gazing at all these proceedings in the same old silent way, as they drank in turn, refilled and passed round the drinking-horn. There are certain brews the contemplation of which the wise do not interrupt with conversation.

In the last gleam of the sunset Tamsin rode slowly towards the moor. She was not tall, but her slight figure gave her an appearance of more than middle height. In the slanting light, the backs of the newly shorn flock in front of her gleamed white as silver, and for the moment the rusty coat of the unclipped pony shone like burnished copper. But Tamsin's head was bright as the edge of one of the fleecy clouds scattered on the soft pellucid sky above, which, catching something of the glory of the passing sun, seemed to float like golden islands on an emerald sea.

Even the rough moorland folk must have been dimly conscious of something in Tamsin different from themselves—of a romance and beauty beyond anything that entered into their hard and homely lives. Peter Jay, the parish clerk, one of the first on earth to call when the jug ran low, forgot to drink and spoke with the foaming cup arrested not three inches from his lips.

"I tell 'ee what 'tis, Mr. John Scutt, you be no beauty, you know—not you yourself. Not one, as I should say, for the show ring. No. You be not. Now, that's flat. An' as for Jane, well, there! You chose her. You wed wi' her. She's your missus.

So tidden for I to speak. But your Tamsin—there—she really is so neat an' so pretty as a flower."

"She is," said the old Isaac Cledworth, his head on one side, with the air of a critic. "An' so quick as a bird—by that I do mean, if I may so speak, so bright in her intelleck like. Different to folk hereabout. But all that I do allow, she learned to the boarden school."

CHAPTER III

THE BEACON HEAD

Tamsin passed slowly out of view.

What with serving the shearers since early morning and preparation for the party in the evening she had spent a busy day. Now everything was ready and only waited whilst the men just cleaned themselves and slipped into their dancing clothes. The shade of the leafy hedgerow was cool and refreshing, and Tamsin could well spare a few minutes to loiter. So the pony dropped into his most deliberate pace. The sheep spread into the ditch to get a bite of grass as they passed, or climbed the bank to pull a leaf from some ivy-covered trunk.

The coming festivity aroused in the heart of Tamsin no joyful anticipation. Amongst the relatives and young farmers she had found no acceptable sweetheart, nor was she looking for one, like most of the village girls who had come tripping to Hatchbarrow that afternoon. It was part of the life into which she had been born—a life in which idyllic simplicity was shaken together with coarseness and brutality like mixed corn and chaff in a measure. But a strange fate had early taken Tamsin by the

hand to lead her into quiet, pleasant fields remote and different from the rugged wildness of Eddyford and the moor. Always she came back as out of dreams into reality. Then, again, the dreams were the only true thing, and some of the surrounding life little better than a nightmare. Tamsin hoped and prayed that things might go well that evening. But the fact is the guests at Hatchbarrow were apt to get a great deal too wild and noisy.

For the moment everything was still and calm. The wind had scarcely breath enough to rustle the beech leaves. She need not hurry. She stopped, lifted her blue pinny and from her pocket drew a little three-cornered note. Then Tamsin read. Every word, every syllable she knew by heart. Yet Tamsin read. And Tamsin sighed. And the cheeks of Tamsin reddened as the evening cloudlets overhead had already done even since she rode out of the barton.

Suddenly she lifted her head and listened.

Was there still a visitor upon the road? Yes. Her ear could distinctly catch the dull thud of a horse's hoofs on the soft peaty earth of the common. She hastily thrust the letter out of sight. It would be just as well to get her flock through the gate first, instead of having to pass this late-comer in the narrow lane.

"Speak to them, Brin!"

They were quickly at the lane's end.

As Tamsin was picking her way to the front of her sheep, she caught sight of the approaching horseman cantering between distant clumps of yellow gorse. It was no belated guest. A young man, well dressed—a gentleman, on a horse well cared for. Before she could identify him he dropped out of sight in a hollow of the moor. Again he mounted the ridge, saw her and quickened his pace. Preoccupied with her sheep, Tamsin found scarcely time to look up, until he was quite close.

He waved his hat.

She stopped—stared in wonder—then cried out in surprise:

"Philip!"

"Thomasine!"

He dismounted—was hurrying towards her.

But Tamsin held up her hand.

"Stop! Stop! Let the sheep run through first!" He drew back, laughing merrily.

"Come along, then. Make haste, Shepherdess!" She held open the gate. The old dog, at the tail of the flock, gave a bark. Like a torrent let loose, the sheep ran away, to scatter amongst furze and heather, and Tamsin was free.

"Oh, Thomasine! What luck! 'Tis more than I could have hoped for, dearest, to meet you alone like this."

He took her in his arms, lifted her from the pony and kissed her again and again.

The girl cast an anxious glance at each winding track across the moor, then over her shoulder down the lane by which she had come. Then followed a hurried whispered explanation.

"Will any one pass this way?"

- "You can't be sure. 'Tis our shearing. But, for certain, by this time, all that are coming must have come."
 - "I knew you were shearing."

"Then you were coming to the party?"

"Mr. Marshall sent me because it was certain your father would be at home."

"Then you were coming on business?"

"Yes. It is arranged about Hatchbarrow, Thomasine. There is but one point to settle."

"For father to buy it?" asked Tamsin, eagerly.

"Yes. They have virtually accepted Mr. Scutt's offer—after all their higgling."

"Then Hatchbarrow will be our own?"

"Yes."

"He will be glad."

"Why, Thomasine, you will be such an heiress that I——"

She interrupted him with shy impatience, which, nevertheless, blushed a plea for toleration with so absurd a sensibility. "Don't, Philip, say that sort of thing. It troubles me." Yet the beaming face of Tamsin betrayed her pleasure. After all, there is great comfort in the knowledge that one's father is prosperous, has bought a freehold estate and henceforth will till his own land.

"There is just time for the Beacon," he begged of her.

"Supper is laid. They were getting ready to go in----"

"But we see each other so rarely, Thomasine."

"Mother will be calling. They will miss me," she hesitated.

"Come, darling. Just for a minute. Come."

What did she care if they waited and called? So long, that is, as none guessed the cause of the delay. Once more she glanced around. Everywhere upon the moor was an unbroken solitude.

"Come, then."

He lifted her into the saddle. She gave her pony a pat upon the neck, turned his head from home and trotted from the shadow of the trees into a deep hollow cut in the hillside by a brook which dwindled in summer to the merest rill. The banks were high and they were out of sight. The gap was bestrewn with rocks. But Tamsin led the way by a crooked track made by the wild ponies, avoiding all treacherous patches of bright green moss flecked with the white down of cotton grass. So they mounted the steep to the head of a moorland ridge looking down upon the sea. There was no true path over the height. Whortleberries were not ripe, and at that season of the year none but the idle climbed so far. The afterglow that heralds the dusk still lit the grey stones of an ancient cairn. Close by leaned the stump of a broken post, which may once have held aloft a beacon cradle. It served the lovers for a tethering-place. Far below, beyond a wood dense and mysterious, lay the sea, purple-blue where it met the tree-tops, but fading away in streaks of grey and silver. Across the channel, a dim outline of coast, beautiful, fairy-like, romantic, with green hills melting in a veil of haze, seemed to float upon the waters. In the fleeting light it changed with the minutes and was inconstant as a dream.

They sat down upon a square boulder with their arms around each other, and between their kisses gazed into each other's eyes.

His was a frank manly face, not over dark, though his cheeks were tanned with the open air. And his grey eyes were bright and honest, with a suspicion of humour lurking somewhere behind them, even when they looked upon Thomasine most tenderly. His hair was brown and wavy, and a little peninsula of well-trimmed whisker jutted down between the ear and the cheek. Otherwise the face of Philip was shaven. He wore a white neckcloth, a blue flop-tailed coat with brass buttons, and a linen shirt with a goffered front.

"Oh, Thomasine!"

" Philip!"

In such few words can the tongue of love manage to say so much!

They had been lovers for years. They had been secretly engaged for months. Nobody was told of it except Isabel Marshall, daughter of the old lawyer Marshall who had just purchased the land for her father. She had been Thomasine's bosom friend at

the boarding-school. It happened when Thomasine last went to stay with Isabel-one of those visits to gentry which caused comment amongst the neighbours-at the time of the drizzling rain when the last sea-fog hung over the moor. For it was one of the doting absurdities of John and Jane Scutt that their Thomasine was weak in the chest. They were so anxious about this only girl. "Fine clear weather," insisted John Scutt, "the maid is sound as a bell-but-come a sea-fog-well-" Such foibles caused great amusement in Eddyford. everybody was the better for them and none the worse. Isabel was charmed to have her friend. Lawyer Marshall was pleased to be able to show attention to a growing client. As to Thomasine and Philip-

"Oh, Thomasine!"

"Philip!"

It happened in the side street in the small markettown of Netherton, with a sprinkling of people in sight and windows in all directions. Words were few, and they could but whisper their promises; but they promised with both their hearts. Yet there were difficulties in the way. They had thought it better to say nothing at present, since they could not hope to marry for a long time. For Philip was little older than Thomasine. He had been articled to the lawyer Marshall and was with him still. He was not well off, had little but his future profession to look to, and there would be opposition for certain from all his friends. So they had only told their love—a love, sweet, pure, beautiful as a spring flower. A love so full of the spirit of hope that it must live for ever and ever. And that was what they promised. No matter how long they must wait—no matter what troubles and difficulties, for ever and ever. Since then they had only seen each other for a few minutes, on those rare occasions when Thomasine, of a market day, went with her father into Netherton town.

They looked across the sea.

Far away against the soft, scarcely perceptible grey outline of the distant coast was the gleam of a white sail.

"She is a fine ship," said Philip, "outward bound, with who knows what adventures before her."

At the words, a vague but tender emotion stirred in the heart of Thomasine, as when one's soul responds to the human in some commonplace incident or perceives a deeper significance in the line of a poem. Their hands were clasped. Philip felt her fingers close more warmly upon his.

"How would you like, Thomasine dearest, for you and me to be sailing away together over the sea, mile after mile, day after day, to some new country, on the other side of the world."

And Thomasine took up the parable.

"To some country where nobody should be proud, where nobody should be mean——"

"Where nobody should interfere with any-body," laughed Philip.

"Where nobody should look down on anybody,

where nobody should be unkind-where-"

Finding her hesitate, Philip once more came to her help.

"Where everybody should love somebody, and everybody marry the one they love, and everybody live happy ever afterwards."

But Thomasine let drop the fairy tale and came

back to themselves.

"It will not matter when we are always together," she whispered, and hid her face on his shoulder. She was so simple, there could be no place for reticence in a love so pure. And yet one may sometimes be shy, even of the tenderness of one's unspoken thoughts.

"Do you mean it, Thomasine?"

Mean it! What answer could she return to such

a silly question? She only drew the closer.

"That you would be happy to go to a new country? Thomasine, dear, I shall never like the law. I don't like their musty old parchments. I don't like their ways. I don't like the office and the stiff-legged table and the chair. If a thing must have legs let it be a living thing, Thomasine. I ran free too long on these moors to live indoors. There is nothing in it but to spend your days in a hutch like a tame rabbit. I shall never be able to buy a Hatchbarrow, Thomasine, and pay for it out of the law."

"Why couldn't you take a farm?" said Thomasine timidly.

Philip shook his head. "I could not manage it,

Thomasine."

"Father would tell you what to do."

But Philip looked unconvinced.

"A gentleman can be a farmer, Philip. Your

own father farmed his glebe."

"Thomasine, darling! My father left us very poor indeed. But all my uncles who went to America are rich. The money coming to me is enough to make a start there. But such a humble start here. And we should go to friends—friends who would welcome us, Thomasine."

He must have thought much of the scheme. It was complete in his mind and he spoke with the warmth of an advocate. Suddenly, the girl raised her head and looked into his eyes, with an intuition clear and certain.

"Philip! You have spoken to your mother."

Philip was found out. He was frankness itself, but he had not intended to worry Thomasine with this so soon.

"Yes, dear—I told her. I hate carrying about a secret. Better have it out. Otherwise it will pop out to disconcert you. Yet I meant to keep this one from you. I told her this morning. I—I am glad I told her, after all—and glad also that you know it."

So the inevitable time, that she had thought of so

constantly and dreaded so much, was come. Thomasine put no questions to Philip. After all, Philip's mother was a lady of such marvellous strength of character and so well known in the neighbourhood, that nobody in Eddyford would have found it necessary to inquire what Philip's mother might have said. Thomasine looked very sad. With all his cheerfulness of disposition, Philip made but a poor attempt to pass the matter lightly by.

"I must admit," he laughed, "at the first glance, she did not appear to regard the matter

with a favourable eve."

Thomasine, uncomforted, looked thoughtfully upon the distant sea.

"It is only natural. I quite see that," she presently began, speaking with a slow despondency. "I am not a lady by birth. Father and mother are but plain rough folk. She could never be happy in their company nor they in hers. Sometimes they say and do things that make even me ashamed. But I love them dearly, and ten minutes afterwards I am ashamed of myself. They love me. They worship me even to absurdity. I am all the world to both father and mother. Mother will not let me put a hand to anything rough. They think a lot of money. They toil for it-slave for it. Yet they spent to have me taught above their station. Oh! we have our pride as well. We are upright and can look anybody in the face. And

honest to the last farthing. And after all, the Scutts have held Hatchbarrow for a pretty deal more than a hundred years, and——"

"Yes. Thomasine darling, my mother knows all that. I have heard her praise your people hundreds of times. She knows the good old stock from which they spring. Everybody on the whole countryside both knows and speaks of it."

For a moment he silenced her with kisses, but

Thomasine had more to say.

"If we should ever go away-I am willing to do anything for your happiness, Philip, but if we should—out of their reach—for they would agree to it-oh! what would happen to them? Across the seas, to their minds, I should be as far off as if I were dead. They would never expect to see me again. Poor father and mother! I am the one joy of their lives. Except for me, it is all work, and get, and save."

"Think no more of it, darling. We must wait a

very short time and it will all come right."

"Your mother will never consent."

"Give her a chance, Thomasine dear. It was as well to pay her the compliment," laughed he, for he had already thrown aside his annoyance with the telling of it.

"Oh, Philip!"

"But we'll do as we like after all."

"Oh, Philip! You could never change."

" Never."

"Nothing ever can come between us."

"Nothing on earth, Thomasine."

"You will always love me—no matter—whatever happens."

"Love you, Thomasine-"

Thus they came back to the old, old story. That old story in which so much of the force and the beauty is to be found in the punctuation. It was as if all the house-sparrows of Hatchbarrow were mating of an early April morning after rain. There was such a sound of chirruping that even the lawyer Marshall's middle-aged old roadster, taking it for encouragement to himself, began to get restive and think it time to go. Philip was driven to get up and quiet him.

Thomasine rose also.

The sun had sunk out of sight. The light had passed away from her sails and the solitary ship was no longer to be seen.

" I must go."

"Just a little longer, Thomasine dear."

"They will all be wondering. Every tongue will be wagging. Somebody might even come to look for me," she laughed.

" Just one minute."

"Truly I must not. I must go."

Yet they sat down once more.

"Thomasine! Do you mind if we keep our secret a little longer?"

"Just whatever you think wise," she whispered.

"But perhaps we can talk again."

"You will stay to the party?"

"Yes. For some time at any rate."

"Come soon. Supper is ready. Come just as we are settled. I will meet you at the gate when you leave. But now—I cannot stay. There may be someone in the lane. Ride round the hillside and come by the true road."

So they parted. Only for half an hour—it was a parting nevertheless. They made the most of it.

"Once more, dearest."

"Good-bye," sighed Philip.

"Not good-bye. Say au revoir."

Perhaps after all the old Isaac Cledworth was right in the matter of that boarding-school.

Pony and maid were moorland bred. They went clattering over the stones without fear or danger. Between the high hedges the lane was almost dark. The barton seemed to be empty as she passed through the gate, and the barn's doors were shut. But before she could reach the stable-door young Isaac Cledworth stepped out from the gloom of the cow-stalls.

"Hullo, Tamsin! Why you be slow at shepherding to my mind," he drawled with a grin.

"I galloped round the Beacon Head for the sake of a ride," laughed Tamsin.

"Tamsin, look here, I waited about to have a word wi'ee, Tamsin. Look here——"

"There's no time," said she.

"Only a minute. Just a word in your ear. Look here—"

"But they're all waiting."

"Here then—one minute——" He was standing between her and the house, but he stepped forward and laid his hand on the rein. "You'll be all so quick, because I'll just tie up the pony for 'ee."

"Thank you kindly. If you will be so good,"

replied Tamsin as she slid from the saddle.

"Tamsin. Listen to me a word. I can never so much as get to tell 'ee. I do love 'ee——"

But Tamsin was no longer there to hear.

No sooner had he lifted the bridle over the pony's head than she ran away through the garden hatch to where the voices of the shearers were to be heard in front of the porch.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTY

"TAMSIN!"

"Where's Tamsin?"

"Where is Tamsin then?"

"I must speak. I never afore witnessed the like." As she came running up the garden path, a little flushed, a little flurried, a little out of breath, Tamsin could distinguish that the voices, from the impressive bass of Peter Jay the parish clerk to the shrill treble of the old Isaac Cledworth the tithing-man, were all clamouring with one accord of the unaccountable absence of Tamsin. Tamsin knew, without any telling, what the excitement was all about. But what did she care? Philip was coming. Philip was near. He would be at the party. He would stay for a dance. She should see him and talk to him again.

The shearers had not gone indoors. They could not go in without Tamsin. They stood loitering around the porch, just as if it had been Sunday and they waiting to troop into church at the back of the parson's cassock. There was far more commotion than if parson had been late. Such irregularity might be due to an accident or pardonable absence

of mind. For Tamsin there could be no excuse. A sense of grievance found expression in this universal cry, "Where is Tamsin?"

"Hullo! Here is Tamsin!"

They came crowding around her so close that she could not go forward. Talking all at once, they put questions and answered them in the same breath.

"Where have 'ee been, Tamsin?"

"There's no excuse 'pon earth that'll hold good, unless Tamsin do own she have a-been a-courting," squeaked the shy little voice of the tithingman.

Then all the rest took up the tale.

"Have 'ee been a-courting?"

- "By the face o' Tamsin, I'll swear she must ha' been a-courting," cried Peter Jay, and the better to support his assertion put his finger to raise her chin.
 - "Who is it then?"
 - "We be all here."
 - "No. No. Stop a minute. Not so fast."

"Count up."

"All here but the young Isaac!"

"Now that do look bad."

"Ay. The young Isaac! The young Isaac!"

"Who else could it be?"

- "Ho! ho! You be sly, Tamsin."
- "You be a double-faced maid, you be---"

They were all good-humoured, in part from the old brew. One gave her a push and another

pretended to save her from falling. But Peter Jay, the parish clerk pulled her round by the sleeve of the blue pinny and spoke close to her ear in an earnest whisper.

"If you've a-send young Isaac in haste to put in the banns, 'tis very short-sighted, Tamsin. For he'll find the house locked up, an' by the same token

here's the key in my pocket."

"I must speak. So many such remarks to a

young maid is unseemly."

And before the roars of laughter had died away, the old Isaac Cledworth stepped forward, and putting on the manner of a tithing-man with a delinquent, laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I shall speak sharp to Isaac on the matter," he said. "But, Tamsin, where's they posies?"

"Ay. The posies. Our posies. We've a-waited half a hour a'ready," answered the full chorus.

Tamsin, with an air of innocence, childlike enough to deceive the wisest there, replied with a question.

"What posies?"

To be behind-hand with a duty is one thing and may happen to the best of mankind, but to affect ignorance of a well-known established attention to one's neighbours clearly indicates the presence of that objectionable form of pride usually described by the term "stuck-up." Resentment was to be detected in the murmur of that little crowd.

[&]quot;What! No posies for the shearers!"

"A maid an' a flower garden an' no posies!
'Tis a thing unheard of.''

"Now that's Tamsin's pride."

"That's what do come of so much foolen an' schoolen-"

"I must speak. I never heard o' such a thing—so woeful proud or so wilful neglectful—not in the

whole course o' my life."

But Tamsin did not care. In secret her heart was laughing at them and their posies, for at any moment Philip might be there. With a toss of the head, she pushed her way between the grumblers and into the porch. They were all ready for the party and so was she. She took off her blue pinny and laid it on the stone seat. Without a word she pushed to the great oaken door, and from the corner behind it drew a flat earthenware cream-pan filled with fresh bunches of sweet smelling flowersmignonette, gilawfers, pinks, and here and there a wallflower. She had hidden them there in readiness, out of the light on the cool stones, and now the evening air was filled with fragrance. All in her white frock, ready for the party and the dance, Tamsin stepped out upon the path and, holding the brown vessel pressed against her left side, dealt out a posy apiece to each of the shearers.

How they all laughed to find themselves "so proper a-sucked in." Each one declared that, as for himself, so soon as ever Tamsin asked "What posies?" he knew that Tamsin had not forgotten,

never could forget, "they posies." But the old Isaac Cledworth, sly little fox, stepped behind her back and putting his hand under her arm managed, unseen, to finger away one of the posies and to hide it in his hat.

"Why Tamsin! For all so much schooling, you be no true reckoner, sure. You be a posy short," he cried with concern as she came to the end.

"Everybody has one," replied she glancing from one to another.

"Young Isaac is not in yet. You do know, sure. Who should if you don't? Young Isaac," they all shouted in chorus.

"He'll have to take you yourself, Tamsin. An' a happy man he'll be," whispered old Isaac with a wink nobody saw because of the dusk.

Tamsin set down the empty pan, ran to the flower-knot, picked quickly a bunch of flowers and tied it up with a ribbon of the long striped grass that grew in the middle of the plot. By the time she returned to the porch, old Isaac Cledworth had put back the posy into the pan and young Isaac was coming up the path.

"Be sprack, young Isaac. Here's a posy so big as a picklin' cabbage, a-picked a-purpose for your very own self, an' Tamsin a-waitin' to pin un in

your buttonhole."

Young Isaac quickened his pace to a run. He came too late.

Tamsin had clapped down the pan, and taken wing

like a bird. Young Isaac might choose whichever posy should chance to take his fancy and fasten it in for himself.

"Not for you. Never in this world. Not for you,

young Isaac," laughed the shearers.

"Yet, where a maid's so coy, there must be a thought. Now we do know wi' the sexes a thought do lead to a look, an' a look is the best half of a inkling, an' a inkling is next o' kin to a whisper in the ear, an' a whisper in the ear is the first step to the altar rail. So there you be," argued Peter Jay

optimistically.

Others also took a hopeful view of the matter. For let an idea of this sort once take root in the neighbourhood of Eddyford, it never ceased to spread and grow. Many a harmless couple, with no such intention in the world, had been driven into very successful matrimony, merely to escape the fatigue of perpetual reiteration, and from the desire to hear no more about it. However, for the present discussion was cut short.

"Come along then. Come on to once."

It was the hospitable voice of John Scutt who had come out to the door. He turned and led the way. The shearers with their posies merrily trooped after him to join the other guests already assembled in the great kitchen.

"There, shake yourselves down together. Friends and sweethearts, match yourselves up, how you be

a-minded "

Changed from head to foot, shaven, scrubbed, buttered, brushed, in a white stock and a black coat, standing at the head of his table-board, even after the guests were seated, John Scutt was scarcely to be recognized as the man with the pitch-kettle. His clothes displayed a fit and style hitherto unknown in Eddyford. The fact is, Tamsin had taken the matter seriously in hand. In her opinion. and who shall say that it was not based on first-rate authority, the Netherton tailor was no good. She had insisted on accompanying her father to Exeter, and there she chose the cloth and the neckcloth, and all the lot of it, watched him measured and gave admonitions as to the cut. He might do as he liked upon the farm, but in town or in company henceforth he should be fit to be seen. Tamsin had her reasons as we know. And now she glanced at him with secret pleasure. Philip was coming and her father looked really nice. The clothes were perfect, and he already unconscious of them. Shearing done, company present and everything going well, his roughness changed to a hearty joviality. In Tamsin's eyes he looked the plain substantial yeoman, worthy to be the owner of Hatchbarrow, as carving knife and fork already in hand, loudly in haste to be hospitable, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Who says beef? Isaac, sit down an' carve the ham. Peter Jay, there's a spare-rib right under your nose—that is, if you've a-got eyes to see. Now then, Jane. What have 'ee got your end?"

The table was a long oaken board set on trestles. Erect and silent, in cap and company-gown of stiff watered silk, with an anxious expression on her weather-beaten face, Jane had watched the guests shuffle into their places. Prosperity had not conferred on Jane Scutt a freedom from care. Rather it seemed to have cast a burden of anxiety upon her. She sighed under the responsibility of these two rows of visitors.

When Peter Jay declined to express an opinion on Jane's beauty he exercised a prudent reserve. The mother of Tamsin was tall and broad, yet she was uncommonly bony. There was no mock modesty in that matter. Wherever there was a bone you could see it. Her cheek-bones were high and prominent, and her chin sharply defined. Her shoulders showed like mountain ridges under the silk and her elbows looked as if they would pierce the tight sleeves. Iane was strong and gaunt. Yet her features were even and well formed. One might imagine her a beauty in her girlhood. But that was past and gone. Her hair was still black as a gipsy's, but her cheeks were sallow and thin, and the lines in her forehead were deep-marked as furrows on a soil of clay. But Jane had done much work. Her hands, large and muscular as a man's, for the moment resting on her breast with fingers interlocked, were veined and ridged, and almost as brown as the buck-horn handle of the carver in front of her. Jane's eyes wandered slowly up and down the table.

closely observant, but always full of anxiety. They were always so. It was a common talk amongst the neighbours that Jane Scutt, with everything that heart could wish for, must needs carry the woes of the world on her countenance.

The sumptuous appearance of the feast begot an immediate merriment in the hearts of the guests, but Iane found never a smile for their sallies. Yet deep in her heart lay concealed a silent pride. The spirit of her Tamsin was present everywhere. rested upon a table more daintily spread than was usual in a moorland farm at that period. The snowwhite cloth was laid with an accurate precision. The trellis of pastry on the surface of the cheesecake was of a lighter, more elegant structure than usual. The white paper frill concealed the knuckle of the ham with a sweeter, more unconscious chastity. Even the obese bowl of furmety in the centre held itself with a kind of stately grace. Jane was dimly conscious of a distinction that followed the touch of Tamsin.

The guests also suspected her handiwork.

"Ah!" cried the old Isaac Cledworth as he took his seat, "I shall taste the little vinger o' Tamsin in thik cheese-cake. I do know I shall."

The face of cousin Jane Peters beamed. "Now, Tamsin, really do set out a table tastey, to my mind."

"I must speak. Work lavished on vain show is little better 'an waste o' time."

And Tamsin tripped to and fro happy and smiling, giving here and there a last touch, handing to one and passing to another. Yet, although she seemed to be so attentive all the time, her ear was listening for the sound of hoofs in the barton or a step on the flagstones that paved the way from the gardenhatch to the porch. Before the first carving was half completed, and she free to sit down, there came a sharp rat-tat of the iron ring that lifted the front door latch.

John Scutt shouted at the top of his voice: "Hullo! Here's a late bird. Better late than never. Ope' the door an' walk in, you slack-twisted lagabout—whoever you be."

To this welcome came no response. It may be that the heartiness of the invitation was drowned in the clatter of knives and forks and the hubbub of talk and laughter.

"Just run, Tamsin, and see who 'tis."

"What, Master Philip? Never! Ho! ho! Lord A'mighty! Master Philip!"

The entrance of Philip was greeted with surprise, then with laughter and finally with something like cheers.

Philip shook hands with the Scutts, and nodded around the table to one after another.

"How do you do, Cledworth? Don't get up, Peter Jay. How are you, Miss Peters? How do you do, Isaac?"

Although he had not seen much of the good folk

of Eddyford for some years he knew them all, and after a manner was one of themselves. His father, a former rector of Eddyford, a mighty sportsman in his day, and one who farmed his glebe, died when Philip was a youth, leaving his widow and only son but poorly provided for. With difficulty Philip had been articled to the profession he detested. In his mother's opinion it was a necessity of his gentility. She had her way, but a boyhood in the woods and on the moors had been like to prove too strong for her. That Master Philip was a favourite, the chorus of greetings bore evidence.

"Sit down, Master Philip," cried John Scutt.
"Here—, here's room for another place. Next to our Tamsin's empty chair."

"I am in luck," laughed Philip. "I came on

business, Mr. Scutt, and find a feast."

"Victuals an' drink first. Another knife an' fork Tamsin. That's my religion. A plate and a glass. Tamsin. Then work. Sit down, Master Philip, and make yourself at home."

"An' sure! Tamsin's extra posy'll come in after

all," said the deep voice of Peter Jay.

"Posies be for shearers," objected young Isaac in his slow drawl from the other end of the table.

"Why, you young fool, Master Philip's a lawyer," shouted his father. "All lawyers be shearers. An' in that you'll bear me out. Won't 'ee, Master Philip?"

This stroke of wit was so well received that Peter Jay ran and brought the posy.

Then they called aloud for a pin.

Nobody had a pin.

"Come, cousin Jane Peters," coaxed John Scutt. Thereat everybody took up the joke and insisted that, somewhere concealed upon her person, cousin Jane Peters of Eddyford must and for certain did possess a pin. This accusation cousin Jane Peters most unblushingly denied, but with such warmth that the old Isaac Cledworth, speaking as tithingman, declared that, only give him time to procure a search-warrant, he would be bound to pretty quick find that pin.

"I must speak. To mention the word searchwarrant to a lady in the presence of company does

and must savour of indelicacy."

Cousin Jane Peters, in the greatest haste produced a pin of the largest and strongest variety, but only, as she explained, at the imminent risk of the rising of her stomacher.

"I must speak;" uncle Jeremiah Brook frowned upon cousin Jane Peters severely, "I do like truth."

Finally they insisted that Tamsin must fasten the posy in. Tamsin's fingers quickly made it fast to the broad lapelle on one side of the goffered front.

So Philip decorated like the rest became one of the party, and with the good cheer the mirth increased. The hum of conversation which began like a swarm of bees grew into a charm of voices as noisy as Netherton pleasure fair. But the ear of old Isaac Cledworth had been quick to note that Master Philip was come on business. All the while his cunning little inquisitive slit of an eye flitted from the face of John Scutt to the young lawyer and back again. Every time there came a lull in the clatter his sharp little tongue popped in a sly word or two.

"Have another piece o' cheese-cake, Master Philip."

"Thank you."

"Ah! He spoke truth. Master Philip did come 'pon business. I do see that."

And as soon as the laughter died away, he was at it again harping on the same string.

"Talking o' business now did I hear right, Master

Philip, that Hatchbarrow is for sale?"

Innocence itself could not look more transparent than the old Isaac Cledworth's guile. It deceived even his intimate friends and all the company began to shout at once:

"Why, 'tis common talk."

"To be sure 'tes."

"Hatchbarrow? For sale for six months and more."

A frown slowly settled on John Scutt's square face.

"Ay. So I've a-heard tell," persisted the old Isaac speaking more clearly and deliberately as he

took note of his host's annoyance. "An' I had a funny dream—a rummy dream I do call it—o' Hatchbarrow a-sold to one that wouldn' turn out neighbour Scutt."

"Pack o' nonsense," cried John Scutt.

"An' I thought to myself like—who then? If not neighbour Scutt his own self——"

"Tomfoolery!"

"An' he've a-raked together the ha'pence, we do know—an—"

John Scutt shook his head and snorted more loudly than in the barton. Many people take a pride in becoming rich. He certainly showed a most incomprehensible hatred of hearing his money talked about.

"An' what more likely—an' what more pleasant to folk around—or a wiser thing—or more natural like—or more to be commended? An' folk do say——"

"Fools'll say anything."

"An' yet, neighours—" The constable was speaking with a most irritating deliberation. "Mr. John Scutt don't say 'No'."

With an air of plain dealing and closing the matter

at once, John Scutt turned abruptly to Philip.

"They'll believe you, Master Philip, I dare say," cried he. "Have I bought Hatchbarrow?"

Philip hesitated.

"Speak out."

"No doubt you have, Mr. Scutt. With a quite

unimportant stipulation, they have taken your offer," was the unexpected reply.

The cloud departed from John Scutt's countenance. The transaction had been arranged advantageously beyond his hopes, for he had quite expected to give more. Yet his dislike of the mention of his riches might have been detected behind the outward carelessness with which he tried to set aside and account for the purchase.

"Oh, well! Maybe the more fool I. I shall have

to find the money to pay for it."

"Now, as to that, I really must speak. Interest

is so bad to pay as rent to my thinking."

Nobody called in question so sound an economic consideration. Nobody noticed it. Here was news upon which every one present would be able to speak with authority at many a coming market or fair. If any of the neighbours cherished envy in their hearts of John Scutt's remarkable ability as a money-maker this was not the occasion to express it. They were still assisting the mastication of his victuals by frequent draughts of Jane's strongest brew. They raised their glasses. They stood up. A chorus of congratulations arose from both sides of the table.

"Well, I do wish you an' Jane uck."

"An' so do I, too."

"An' many years to enjoy your property."

"An' increase it, Mr. Scutt."

Carried away by the excitement, the old Isaac

Cledworth at last leapt upon his chair in order to do the thing properly and make a speech. For once he cast aside his banter and spoke in plain terms his praise of neighbour Scutt. Where could one be found more worthy to own land? All the company shouted that it was true. Where a healthier flock or cleaner grounds than at Hatchbarrow? Where a neighbour less prone to borrow and more willing to lend? Nowhere upon this earth. Encouraged by the universal acclamations, he finished with the proposal: "Three cheers for Squire Scutt, the founder of the feast—coupled wi' the name o' missus, to be sure, all so well Hip-hip-hip-Hoorah!"

The old oak beams rang as they cheered him three times three. Even Tamsin, who distrusted everything that came from the lips of a Cledworth, was pleased. And her father replied, in his rough, abrupt manner, that he thanked them all. He was a man of few words. The best he could say, at the present moment, was that, since they could find no better use for their throats than to hollow, the quicker the place was cleared the better the maidens would be pleased. This was the vein in which she liked her father best. Then she realized and appreciated his downright honest mind and the absence of all silliness and affectation.

They had finished supper, and at the hint everybody sprang up at once. Men and maids turned to with a will. They shuffled the plates and dishes into the larder and backhouse, romped the table and trestles into the milkhouse out of the way and arranged forms and chairs wherever there was space to place them along the kitchen wall.

John Scutt took a candle from the table. "Come into the parlour, Master Philip," he whispered, and led the way to that little room, rarely entered, where

everything spoken was a secret.

By the time Philip returned the dancing was in full swing. The old folk had tucked themselves away into nooks between the furniture, or were sitting around and within the great open hearth, upon which only a few sticks were left burning for the sake of the kettle. The fiddler was perched on a three-legged milking-stool out of the way in the left-hand corner of the window-seat. Regardless of a sadly disordered stomacher, cousin Jane Peters was hopping lightly on the centre of the floor, with that grim determination not to let her mind wander which she brought to all her religious observances. Shearers and maidens were jigging reels, shuffling and stamping, turning and windingall but Tamsin, who had been busy about the glasses, and the kettle, and the sugar, and the spoons.

"Come along, Tamsin, before the music stops."

They had but time to shake a toe and turn, but the weather was warm and the evening young, and the fiddler closed it all too soon.

The dancers sat round with their backs to the

wall and fanned themselves or mopped their brows with handkerchiefs.

A voice shouted, "Young Isaac!"

At once the cry was repeated from all parts of the room.

"Young Isaac!"

"Come on, young Isaac."

"Sweet moonlight!"

Very willingly young Isaac obliged the company. He threw back his head, a little on one side, and fixed his eyes on the brown oak beam that intersected the whitewashed ceiling. In rigid earnest, he warbled, literally warbled, in a light tenor voice, a melody of infinite beauty, a sentimental love ballad, chaste and true, beginning with the singing of the nightingales and ending with the ringing of the church bells.

SWEET MOONLIGHT

In the moonlight so sweet
Two young lovers did meet,
Adonijah was the name
And Selina of the same.
Oh! The merry month of June!
Oh! The nightingale's fond tune!
As so early and so late
He discourseth to his mate.

Oh! I love you.
Oh! I love you.
I do—do—do—do.

And all Until fall

I'll be true—true—true—true.

Hidden in the bushes

Where the woodbine pushes,

I will nest with you.

In the moonlight so clear
These young lovers so dear,
Oh! Their eyes shone as bright
As the stars of the night,
And like haws and like hips
Blushed their cheeks and their lips.
Oh! The gay days of youth!
'Tis no more than the truth,

Oh! I love you.
Oh! I love you.
I do—do—do—do.
Every breath

Until death
Shall be true—true—true.

There's no time to tarry, Come then, let us marry. I will wed with you.

In the church porch so gay, Of a midsummer day, Full an hour afore noon In that same month of June, Adonijah came there,

And Selina so fair; And Sir Parson did stand With the book in his hand.

Adonijah! Adonijah,

Where's the ring—ring—ring—ring?
From the page
One short stage

To the fing—fing—fing—fing— Finger of the bride Standing by his side, At their wedding.

Then came more dancing, followed by another song, a ballad of the fair shepherdess who married the lawyer from the town. At which the lovers, smiling at heart, scarcely dared to look at one another. Then they all asked riddles and told tales. With a succession of such simple pleasures the hours passed more quickly than the guests knew. Surely Thomasine was a little too fastidious when she suffered misgivings as to the party.

"One more turn, Thomasine, and I must go." Whilst they danced Thomasine whispered:

"Father will be certain to see you to your horse."

"Where shall I find you, dearest?"

"I will slip out and be waiting for you at the gate."

"When this dance is over."

"So soon?"

"The earlier I start the longer we shall have," he argued.

Both surprise and opposition greeted the announcement that Master Philip must go. But Master Philip was very popular around Eddyford. People said he was always the same—always merry and lighthearted.

" What?"

"So soon?"

" Not for hours."

Yet, after all, reasonable folk must listen to reason. Master Philip came on a borrowed horse, the lawyer Marshall's horse, and the lawyer Marshall was known to be a very touchy and particular old widow gentleman. A man must act with reason, and more than ever with so sacred a thing as another man's horse. Yes, he must. He must so——"

"If stay you can—stay. If go you must—so. Just light up the lantern, Jane," shouted John Scutt, full of bustle to speed the parting guest, but at the same time secretly eager for one word more about Hatchbarrow.

So Philip said "Good-bye" all round, shook hands cordially with Jane and Tamsin, and took his departure.

Out of the kitchen was a way into the dairy-house, and Tamsin already had her hand on the latch of the door.

"Now gentry is gone, I should really suppose there ought to be a chance for a neighbour."

62 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

It was the voice of young Isaac Cledworth by her shoulder, muttering his discontent in her ear.

"The very next dance, Isaac," replied Tamsin, and turned round to him, all smiles.

"Come on then," said he, and offered his arm.

"Tell the fiddler Solinger's Round. I shall be back in a minute."

She waited until he was in conference with the fiddler, then went out, closed the door behind her and escaped through the dairy-house. She ran across the paved yard and under the few mosscovered old apple trees that the Scutts sometimes proudly called the orchard. The moorland country is later than the vale, and the half moon, which had just risen clear of the hill, lighted up a paradise of snowy blossoms. One of the trees, blown down in a spring gale, had, nevertheless, covered its head with a white veil which reached to the ground. Tamsin heard a noise in the dairy-house. Some one was there to whom the place was not familiar. She heard his ejaculation as he stumbled against the leg of a trestle. Tamsin quickly hid amongst the branches that formed a sort of bower around her.

The young Isaac groped his way out into the moonlight—stopped, then followed into the orchard and stood under the trees almost within touch of her. Her white frock was nothing visible amongst the apple blossoms. The young Isaac stood perplexed. He was suspicious and, like all his class,

inquisitive and prying. Moreover, he was in love and slighted. He strode out of the orchard and into the field beyond.

Then Tamsin lightly tripped back into the house and, with a laugh, shut the door and turned the key behind her.

She returned into the kitchen. The dancers had taken partners and the fiddler was tuning up to begin. She pretended to search around in vain, and asked aloud of one and another:

"Where is Isaac then?"

"He was here but a minute agone," they all agreed.

"He promised to dance with me."

Tamsin spoke in such an injured tone that cousin Jane Peters became quite sympathetic.

"Poor maid, then. Where can young Isaac be gone?"

"I must speak," said Uncle Jeremiah Brook."To ask a maid to dance and go is not manners."

She begged them all to be certain to tell Isaac that she should be back in a moment. And so she slipped out by the porch and was free.

CHAPTER V

SWEET MOONLIGHT

THOMASINE stopped by the garden wall and listened. They were talking close by the stable door.

"Then, good night, Master Philip."

"Good night, Mr. Scutt."

She hurried to the shadow by the lilac bushes, lest she might meet her father on his way back to the house.

"Oh! By-the-by! Just one word. One moment, Master Philip."

Her father ran a few steps.

Then again a murmur of confidential discussion in the corner by the entrance to the barton.

To this child of Hatchbarrow every stone and every bush were familiar. She climbed over where the coping had fallen from the old wall, passed behind the gloomy faggot-pile and clambered through a gap in the beech hedge. No one saw her. Everything was still.

After all, she had to wait for Philip at the gate. Her father had so much to say to him about the purchase of the farm.

The open moor lay around them, lonely, dark

and mysterious even on the side of the slope that lay towards the moonlight, which cast shadows from the gorse across the track. Sprinkled on the hillside were misshapen blackthorn bushes. Not even a wild pony moved. The unceasing churning of a nightjar in the heather scarcely seemed to break the silence, but now and then might be heard the melancholy bleating of a distant sheep.

Their time was very short. This thorny life is beset with painful, importunate facts which cry aloud for recognition. It was lawyer Marshall's

horse.

"Oh! When shall I see you again?"

The words were more of a sigh than a question.

"The distance is too far for me to get here in time on foot."

"Oh! If you could, Philip!"

"The house would be locked up."

"But if I knew when-"

"I will, Thomasine dearest. I will-"

"But no. I could not let you. It would be sixteen miles here and back. And you would be out all night."

"That is nothing."

"You would lose your rest."

"What would that matter, love? If only we had seen each other."

"No. It is not possible, Philip dear. Think of some other way. Some better way, but soon—very soon—"

"Very soon, Thomasine, dear. I shall make errands out of this business, you may be sure. We shall see each other almost at once."

"Do, Philip. Do, if you can."

"Then, we must not forget, darling, the glorious seafog season will come, too."

"Not till after the haymaking, Philip."

"But that is now, dear."

"And haymaking may be wet and long"

"Sweetheart, it shall not be long."

"But the almanac this year says it will."

"Take courage, Thomasine, dearest. I will very soon claim you. Believe me, it is better to wait just a little. I know my mother. She will say something in excitement and stick to it in cold blood. But if we wait—it will soon be right."

"I am willing to wait, Philip."
But I am not, Thomasine."

"If only we could see each other, then I should be—oh! so happy."

"But we can trust each other, dear."

"For ever."

"Yes. For ever."

"Oh, Philip! If ever anything should make you change, I should—I should—"

The sentence was never completed, for he smothered the word in kisses and assurances that everything must come right—was right, indeed, since they loved so well. Still they lingered a minute. Yet part they must.

They heard voices in the barton. In the month of June the morning begins early and work begins with the morning. The early birds amongst the revellers were beginning to depart.

"Let it be next week," pleaded Thomasine.

"Yes. Next week."

"Good-bye, dearest."

"Good-bye."

She stood watching as he rode away. She could hear the thud of the horse long after he was lost in the gloom of the hillside. But she also must hasten.

She turned and walked quickly towards the house.

The departing guests drew near, youth which wished for time to loiter, and elderly folk who had already had enough. Some of those who came on foot, now returning to the village in a party, were already halfway down the lane. They were talking about her.

"An' Tamsin was pinched in her pride. I do know she was. That was why she never came back."

"I must speak. Tamsin's pride is but the outcome o' John and Jane's folly."

Behind came the parcel of maidens, now with a sprinkling of men. They were singing a catch to shorten the road.

If Tom kissed Tilly and Abe loved Ann, If Little Billy Bragg was Dorothy's man, Then who was there left to walk out Fan?

68 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

Though Tom kissed Tilly and Abe loved Ann, And little Billy Bragg was Dorothy's man, There were three merry men to walk out Fan.

Tamsin clambered over a gate, and, having crossed a field, entered the garden on one side of the house. Nobody saw her, so far as she knew. When she got indoors young Isaac Cledworth was not in the kitchen. Both her father and mother were out wishing goodbye to the guests.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE PARTY

During Thomasine's absence all quiet, orderly folk had departed. Only men remained, and they, mostly shearers, had many of them begun the evening in a condition of hilarious mirth.

The spirit of the party had completely changed. It was just this fag-end of the night which Thoma-

sine always dreaded.

A scent of brandy pervaded the whole place—of good brandy, as any competent judge might have declared. For, now and then, a few tubs could be run upon the coast, and every farmhouse knew the way to obtain a little moonshine. The kettle was steaming away. Every shearer grasped a steaming glass in his hand and stirred and sipped, and sipped and stirred—every one, except the old Isaac Cledworth. The old Isaac was at that moment as dependent upon others for his liquid nourishment as an infant put out to nurse.

They had packed the little man comfortably into a flour sack, and tied it up around the neck so that the mouth of the sack, elegantly turned down under the chin, might be as handsome as an old-world courtier's ruff. They had managed to hang the old Isaac to the large iron crook in the centre of the oaken beam that crossed the middle of the kitchen ceiling, to which, in days gone by, after pigkilling, many a carcase had been hung, until, under the influence of Tamsin, a new crook was set up in the backhouse. There hung the tithing-man of the parish of Eddyford in his flour sack as snugly as a chrysalis in a cocoon.

"Three cheers for Squire Scutt!"

The old Isaac was still merry. When left to himself he did nothing but call for cheers.

They had made him drunk.

To make Isaac Cledworth, the tithing-man, drunk was the most popular joke of the neighbourhood. It was a good joke when they elected him tithing-man, a post for which he was chiefly qualified by a frailty that dared not be severe. But that was only the second best. They had filled his glass when he was not looking and put spirit in the hot water jug. They had drunk his health one after another all round the party without giving him a moment's rest to draw breath. And all this was done in the interests of science. For the old Isaac when drunk presented a very interesting phenomenon. Good liquor went straight to his legs-those little legs in lambs' wool hose and breeches with the three brass buttons at the knee. But as to his head—a man could treat old Isaac downright handsomely, and, after all, not get the better of him in a deal. So when the old Isaac, in a

too ambitious attempt to dance a hornpipe, sprawled on the floor, out of considerate kindness and for fear he might fall down and injure himself, they had hung him up to the beam. Everybody said it would be a wonderful handy way to carry him home, tooin a sack.

And all the while the old Isaac kept his intellect clear.

"Three more cheers for Squire Scutt."

"Shut up!" cried the company.

"I be," replied the old Isaac. "Three more

He was far too appreciative of the attention shown him to feel resentment. The only way to silence Isaac's mirth and keep him from cheering, was for one of the company to stand before him, ready, as soon as he opened his mouth, to administer refreshment with a spoon.

At the moment when this was being done the young Isaac came in.

Something must have crossed him, for he was evidently much out of temper. He glanced at his father and then scowled on the company around.

"Who did that?"

Nobody answered. At another time the young Isaac might have laughed, but that night he was in no humour for jesting.

"Three more cheers___"

"If I knew who did that," said he, "I'd twist his neck."

72 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

He quickly unhitched his parent from the meathook, chucked him down upon the stone floor, loosened him at the neck and unceremoniously shook him out of the flour sack, from head to foot as white as a miller.

Tamsin fled.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN AND JANE

THE grey morning light was creeping over the hills and the stars were beginning to dim before the last of the revellers departed. John Scutt and Jane barred the door behind them and walked back into the kitchen together.

"They be gone. Thank God!" sighed Jane.

The wooden shutters were still shut. The dark oaken beams, the dresser with no crockery on its shelves, the high-backed settle, set back against the wall to give more room for the dancing, gave a sombre appearance to the house now that the mirth was gone and most of the candles had burnt out. Within doors there was no sign of coming day except the faint light which fell upon the hearth through the great chimney open to the sky. The fire, which had boiled the kettle for the parting grog, with an uncertain flicker did its best to keep alive, but the embers were buried in grey ash. John Scutt sat down in the corner. Jane moved slowly to and fro setting things straight.

"Tamsin a-bed?"

[&]quot;I sent her on," answered Jane. "She came

down by now when the place was a bit quiet. She was none too willing to go. But there's no need for her to slave an' drag her hands abroad. I can do it."

Suiting the action to the word, Jane raised an end of the heavy settle with one hand and lifted it forward as easily as if she were moving an empty pail.

"But that's enough for to-night. There'll be no night at all else. An' 'tis a rest to close your

eyes if but for a half hour."

Yet Jane did not go. She sat down on the settle itself, stiff and angular in her black silk, with her brown hands against her sides and elbows raised, her favourite attitude in moments of thought. eyes were fixed on John, but she did not speak. sat as if waiting for him. He rose, poured brandy into a glass and filled it with water from the kettle hanging on the chimney-crook over the fire and went back into the corner. But he held his tongue.

Jane waited. At last she could hold her peace

no longer.

"So, John, we've won our wish," said she, with one of those deep sighs with which Jane was a-wont to receive events the most satisfactory.

"You don't seem so terrible joyful, Jane, I must

say."

"I do think two ways, an' that's gospel," said Jane, with a shake of the head. "Now an' again I do wonder how 'tis all going to turn out in the end."

John looked at her angrily.

"You be little better 'an a old crow," said he, with a short laugh. "Good or bad all your talk is

croaking."

"I do mean in bringing our Tamsin up so fine. There was a time years agone, when folk did take to the child, when I did seem to think the finger o' the Almighty was in it. But now I ben't so sure. An' maybe wi' her visits to gentry she'll come to look too high an' be left by herself," she explained quickly.

"Well! If her mind is too high, who held wi' it

all?"

"We be poor mortals all. Bad is our best. Who can tell?"

"John! 'Tis clear as day. She's all eyes for Master Philip. But la! He did scarce look our way. Though—mind—he did eye her too—more 'an once an' more 'an twice. But if our Tamsin should catch a mind to he—an' he—he not come forward, so to speak, our Tamsin is not one to overcome a thing."

"What do 'ee mean, Jane?" he asked, impa-

tiently.

"She's so nice an' so naish, an' so tender-like an' so delicate in mind an' ways. She can't throw a thought off. 'Tis there—an' there must bide. Well, now, look here. 'Tis but a week agone a rat got at the roll o' butter. Nothing. Just a tooth-mark and a line where he had a-touched wi' his tail. Do you think our Tamsin could so much as look at the rest o' it? Not she. No. Scrape it how you would. Not a bit o' it-not o' the whole half pound, nor pastry neither. No, John, our Tamsin can't forget. An' that's how she'll be if she do set her heart on a man. Why, when I was a maid and John Frost went off an' wed wi' Jinny Croft, night an' day I cried my eyes out, for a week. But la! I laughed off to church wi' you 'ithin six months. I'm thinking if our Tamsin should be crossed she may bury her thoughts in a coffin o' silence, but she'll go to her grave a maid."

"'Nation seize the woman. You do grow lean wi' your fears, you do. What have 'ee had. Jane? Just a thimbleful too much o' your own

brew."

76

Jane gave no heed to his foolery, but with a mournful shake of the head went on.

"Though our Tamsin may be a bit off hand wi" some o' the neighbours, this I will say-she do love her parents."

"Why not?" interrupted John.

"If she do say a thing, John, say about your clothes or to warn 'ee not to say 'they be 'an' 'they was,' why, 'tis half in fun an' wi' a smile. She do believe in we, John. If her schoolen did make her look down 'pon her home, I-I never couldn't bear it. But schoolen have only raised our Tamsin. Oh.

John! John! If she should ever feel shame of her father an' mother ____ "

"Shut up, Jane. You do dwally."
"Oh, John! If she should ever see us as we truly be! That's what I do fear. Day an' night I do fear it."

"She've a-got eyes in her head, I believe."

"But as we truly be, John. As in our hearts we do know we truly be."

"An' what be we worse than the rest?"

"Sinners all. We be but woeful sinners one an' all. So have it ever a-been. So 'tis. An' so must be. That we do know. But our Tamsin do look 'pon all about her wi' pure eyes that don't see all."

"An' won't never see no different. So shut up."

John was getting crisp in his temper. This sort of talk about sinners he never could abide. There could be no more need to prate about sins than to point out the faults in your own horse.

Jane was silent for a moment, then almost

apologetic.

"I suppose 'tis being the only one. Do make me so fearful. An' our Tamsin is everywhere so much praised. 'Tis terr'ble unlucky to be so much praised. I do fear in my heart we shall lost her. La! I do seem that if she should marry and go the light 'ud be gone from house. If we had a-bred her up like ourselves she might ha' stayed near home, an' one of ourselves. I can't seem to see our Tamsin away in a town, nohow

78 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

whatsoever. Is the money ready for Hatchbarrow, John?"

" Very near."

" All o' it?"

"Soon will."

"When I saw Master Philip look—there came in the very inmost thoughts o' my soul a hope, an' then a fear to hunt the hope away so quick as a hawk round a rick after a linnet."

"Well, cheer up, Jane. Let her go into Nethertontown. That's the best chance for her. There'll be

a few seafogs afore long, please God."

Thus admonished Jane did as she was bid, dismissed her sins and her melancholy and took once more a practical view of the affairs of life.

"I suppose, John, that Hatchbarrow coming all to one, would be more than many gentry can leave

to a maid where there's many?"

"No fear. More 'an Passon Pilton ever had of his own outside the living to will away."

" More 'an his widow can have, maybe?"

John Scutt gave a long whistle, then laughed outright.

"Massy 'pon us, Jane! Just think of Mother Pilton's face if she could hear what you've a-been telling up. Ha! ha! How the chin 'ud stick out so sharp as the point of a new moon."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jane. "An' a nose like the back of a reap hook. 'Tis said she's not well

off."

" Poor as a crow."

"An' proud as Lucifer, I'll warrant. How she did use to manage the parish to be sure. We was but as the dirt under her feet. Do 'ee mind?"

"Ay, all in it, but the old passon hisself. But she can't manage Master Philip, I'll bet a guinea. Too much mind of his own—too much a chip o' the old block."

Jane laughed again. Some of the great people of this world, who take themselves so seriously, might be surprised could they know how the respectful humble forget all deference when they talk of them behind their backs.

After all, the night ended quite merrily, although once more Jane sighed.

"Well! if we don't make haste, there'll be scarce time to change my things, much more get a wink o' sleep, afore milking."

She turned up her stiff silk skirt, leant over the hearth and raked up the embers into a heap with the ashes over them. She took two kindling sticks, one in each hand, and drew two hearts and a "crisscross" on the mound.

When Jane made this sign on the sponge in baking, or the mash in brewing, or to ensure the future of a newly sown onion bed, she did it with her forefingers. But at bedtime ashes still were burning hot. She made use of both sticks for each symbol, placing them together at the top of the heart and bringing them round to meet below at the point. The two

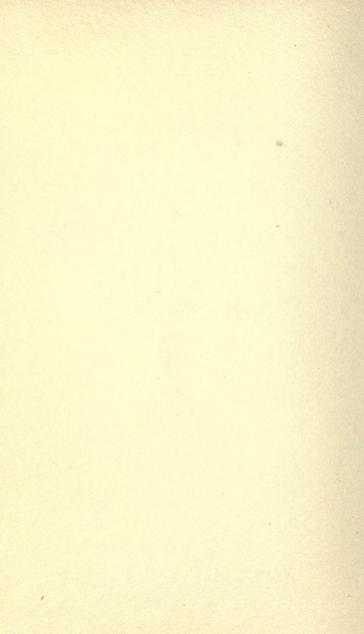
80 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

strokes of the "criss-cross" she made simultaneously, the down stroke with the right and the cross stroke with the left hand. She was religiously particular about these details. Jane Scutt never failed to perform this ceremony before leaving the hearth for the night. It was a sure spell to keep away the pixies and everything unlucky, and Jane's mind suffered much from the anticipation of ill luck.

This achieved she went comforted to bed.

And all the while, in the room overhead, Tamsin, too excited to sleep, was also thinking of Philip and of Mrs. Pilton and of the purchase of Hatchbarrow, and of everything, in fact, that might make or mar the course of that true love which did not promise to run too smoothly.

BOOK II. RETROSPECTION



CHAPTER I

RETROSPECTION

Morning grew. A soft light permeated every nook and corner of the room with its window over the porch. When the sun rose above the hill-top, a narrow ray peered aslant through the leaded panes, cast a gleam upon the floor and an upright line upon the whitewashed wall. Imperceptibly it moved and broadened, lighted the edge of a gilt picture-frame and read the titles on the backs of volumes in the low bookcase underneath. Perchance at first it had but come to peep and then, filled with astonishment, was enboldened to stay and make an inventory.

The room of Tamsin was surely the most surprising ever seen under the plain thatched roof of a moorland homestead.

The walls were half covered with sketches in water-colour—sketches of the moor, of the river, of quaint village nooks in Eddyford, with two, moreover, of a bright-haired child, whom the most casual acquaintance of Tamsin might have identified at a glance. There was no fireplace, but in one of the nooks formed by a projecting chimney

84 THE REVENUES OF THE WICKED

stood a pair of globes. There were two bookcases filled with books—not the mere chance collection that one finds in houses where people do not read, but some of them daintily bound and others almost new. There were pieces of furniture from a region unexplored by the elder Scutts and indicating a culture unsuspected and remote.

In houses like Hatchbarrow at that time the furniture was mostly of oak, ancient, plain and dignified, some of it built in the days of the Tudors. Now and then it was handsome. Jane had a coffer very richly carved. The carving was rarely to be seen, because she kept the front turned towards the foot of the bed. Not from humility, for Jane was proud to know the carving there, but for the better security of the keyhole. Jane kept things in that chest—the sort of things that make a woman of a sighing temperament dream of robbers. Whilst a robber was turning the chest to get at the keyhole she or John was to spring out of bed and knock him on the head with an ashen cudgel kept ready to hand under the valance.

But Tamsin's furniture bore no relation to the life of the Scutts. There was a mahogany writing table and a set of mahogany chairs so light and elegant that they contrasted strangely with the oaken bedstead and washstand of her childhood, which kept them company.

There was much to excite the imagination in this room, with its window over the porch.

When Tamsin, in obedience to her mother, went upstairs morning had already broken. She sat down in a ferment of thought and emotions. going to bed, she was never more wide-awake. first prying ray of sunlight found her still in her white frock and seated before the writing table. Tamsin was no scribe, and neither pens, ink nor paper were before her. Her elbows were on the table. Her head rested upon her hands. The unexpected occurrences of yesterday kept her heart beating and her head in a whirl. The coming of Philip, his kisses and the joy of his love, the knowledge that the terrible Mrs. Pilton had been told that ogre in the background, haunting like a superstition, and who was indeed a superstition since she had no power whatever when withstood-even the purchase of Hatchbarrow-all these things rushed through her mind, jostling each other into endless and fantastic confusion.

In a rapture of love, she called upon Philip. The next moment she was in Netherton Street. Mrs. Pilton, whose impressive personality had been familiar to her from earliest childhood, stately and severe, was advancing towards her on the pavement. She felt her cheeks tingle in dread of the encounter. Not that she was wanting in courage. At the merest slight she would have fought for herself and her own. The sensibility of Thomasine conjured up fears beyond the ills that life has power to inflict. She lived much in her

imagination. Happily her visions were innocent and pure.

Thomasine was very much alone.

She possessed no friend in the world to whom she could discover her heart and soul.

One there had been so simple and kind, that even as a child, Tamsin had been fearless in the presence of so transparent a simplicity. But that one had left her. To her she would have talked, and even amidst this pageant of illusions the memory of that loved countenance, so kind, so peaceful in its quiet self-possession, brought calm. Slowly the heated fancies melted away and Thomasine began to think of things as they were.

Philip had never before spoken of going abroad.

That interview with his mother must have been stormy indeed, since it could make him wish to change the course of his life. To be sure he had always disliked law.

Why should he not turn to farming here? The suggestion became more attractive the more closely she examined it. Surely, if her father could save money to buy Hatchbarrow, he could teach Philip how to succeed. Thomasine wished she might venture to discuss it with her father. But no! That was impossible. To ask Philip if she might tell her parents would look like want of trust in him. Her father would do much rather than let her go. He would help if Philip's money were not enough. Surely there could be no need to go. She

loved this moorland country, and so did Philip. And "abroad" was so terribly far away.

Thomasine felt very much alone. To possess a secret and truly keep it is itself a loneliness.

She rose, went to the window and looked out upon the garden and the barton, where she had run about and played as a child. Nobody was moving as yet. There was nothing to capture the attention or distract. And lo! an incident of the past came vividly back to her mind. With all its details as it happened, but with its full significance understood, it came and passed as rapidly as a dream.

Of an April morning, when the japonica between the window and the porch was clad in crimson and bees were all at work in the smile of early spring, there came a stranger rapping on the hobnailed open door. A bareheaded child watched from a little garden path behind the daffodils. The lady was laden, like a gipsy woman, with many unknown and perplexing things. She knocked again. That was usual at Hatchbarrow. Few strangers came, and the door was open to let in sun and air. People who understood walked round to the back. The child had time to observe. This was a funny lady all in black of a week-day. At last her mother came to the door.

The child listened.

[&]quot;Mrs. Scutt?"

[&]quot;My name is Scutt."

"My name is Airdrie. I have taken the cottage by the bridge at Eddyford—but I dare say you may have heard——"

"Well now," replied Mrs. Scutt, in a tone of unwilling concession after searching her memory to make quite sure. "I did hear say in the parish that a lady had a-tookt the little house at the town's end."

In fact, coming out of Eddyford church of a Sunday for weeks past, Mrs. Scutt had revelled in every detail as to the letting and doing up of that cottage a dozen times repeated. Two pounds a year rise in the rent—very high—four new steps in the staircase—an' not afore 'tis time—thatcher to make good the roof—an' want it too—paper for the parlour walls all the way from Exeter, and a red carpet in the downstair room. But with a "foreigner" one must always exercise a prudent reserve.

"I came to ask if I might go into the farmyard to make some sketches?"

"In the barton? Oh! For certain sure-"

"And I shall not be in the way?"

"Not one mossel-bit."

" Nor do any harm?"

"No harm in the world. Why, there's nothing there but the fowls, the geese, and the old gander. Oh no! Come this way. Tis shorter. An' not so much mud——"

Still talking thus hospitably, Mrs. Scutt led

the way all along the front of the house by the beebutts to the little gate, and they passed quickly out of sight.

The child remainded standing by the daffodils, overawed by the knowledge that an unseen stranger was in the barton. Not until long after all was quiet did she find courage to creep up to the gardenhatch and peer between the upright pales.

Wonder of wonders!

The lady, such a very funny lady, with a long thin face, and round gold spectacles on her nose, and a bonnet with such a wide brim, and a great big bow tied under the chin, seated on a great X for Xerxes out of the Alphabet book, was washing and scrubbing a dirty piece of paper with a beautiful brush. child longed to run closer and look. But she felt shy. Moreover, the gander with the old goose and the yellow goslings were just on the other side of the garden-hatch and the child was at war with all fullgrown geese, although she loved the goslings. She ran away—through the house—into the back garden, where red hairy palmers used to live on a gooseberry bush and beautiful long sticks were stuck up in the ground in a row. There she armed herself, ran between the mows away from the stones and stinging nettles in the corner where the rats lived, and so, bean-stalk in hand she came into the barton on the other side and stood by the pound house, where sometimes the horse went round and round. There she stood and stared.

Jane Scutt, when afterwards talking the matter over in private, estimated the age of the new-comer as "somewhere pretty handy about three score." but in the eyes of the child, this appeared to be a very old lady with hair, the colour of the tail of old "Snowball" the cart mare. She had a wonderful brown mark on her chin with hairs growing on it like the long grass in the middle of the round flower knot.

The funny lady looked up. Then beckoned with her finger.

"Come along, little marigold and forget-menots."

The child took three steps forward.

"Come and tell me your name."

" Tamsin."

"And where did you come from?"

"Out o' back-house."

"I dare say. But how did you get here at all—you little golden-haired infant princess straight out of the Mabinogion? Eh?"

"Straight - out - of - the - Mabble - obble - lom," repeated the child, beginning with slow distinct articulation, but soon getting lost.

"You know it, do you? Then where did you come from?"

The funny lady looked into the child's face so long, and with such close attention, that at last Tamsin was driven to hazard a guess.

" Heabem."

" Little soul!"

The funny lady smiled so sweetly on Tamsin, and said the words with such gentle kindness that the child's confidence was won. Then, without a moment to lose, she went on busily brushing the dirty paper that would not become clean.

"I could do that," said the child.

"Tamsin, I verily believe you could."

"I could do that," repeated Tamsin, "all so well as you—if I had that little brush—to keep."

"Well! If I give you the little brush—to keep how long will you stand quite still?"
"All day," said the child.

"Well, Tamsin, if you can stand still, over by the geese, whilst I tell you a story, when it is finished, I'll give you the little brush—to keep!"

Tamsin stood still, but without understanding exactly what was meant. She had never been told a story.

"Once upon a time, there was a little girl, just as big as Tamsin Scutt, and she wore a beautiful red cloak-"

The old gander knew that the child was at war with the geese. He waddled forward, stretched out his long snake neck and hissed. But the child stood still. He advanced still closer until his yellow bill almost touched the little pink leg between the sock and the knee. The child remained still. The gander was lost in wonder. He had never in his life known anything so strange. Full of thought, he waddled back, gabbled the news into the ear of the mother of the goslings, and came no more. And the story went on from improvised wonder to wonder, such as no child, princess, or otherwise, ever heard before or since. The blue eyes opened wider and wider. The little red lips parted, but Tamsin had nothing to say. Without knowing it, she stood still until at last the story came to an end, just as her mother came to the garden-hatch and called—

"Tamsin! Tamsin, you little mommet, where be?"

"My blessed heart!" exclaimed Jane, and threw up both her arms in admiration. "If you ha'n't a-tookt off our Tamsin to the life. I should know her if I did meet wi' it miles away, by the little old washed-out blue pinny wi' the strent."

The artist was very pleased to hear this, and they all laughed together at the "strent." In order to take a peep at herself in a picture Tamsin had drawn quite close to the funny lady. When they had all laughed their laughs out, thinking of the brush to keep, she shyly hid her face in the stranger's lap. Presently a hand gently stroked the little golden head, and once more softly spoken Tamsin heard the words:

" Little soul!"

From that day the little soul possessed a friend. The sketch was amongst the pictures hanging on the wall of Tamsin's room. Jane Scutt had been most anxious to buy it.

"Oh ay!" said she. "'Tis our Tamsin sure enough. An' didn't take so wonderful long to do, nother. I suppose you do sell your pictures—now, I'll find a crown for he, I will sure, because 'tis our Tamsin. That is if a crown 'll buy 'un. Ay. I'll give 'ee a crown-piece."

At this the funny lady laughed most heartily, but

explained that the picture was not for sale.

Jane was quite used to that sort of tale, one of the most familiar pretexts for raising the price ever practised in moorland horse dealing.

"Well, three half-crowns then. I should rob myself if I did say a penny more than three half-

crowns."

Jane could not understand why an offer evidently received with exuberant pleasure should meet with refusal.

"I couldn't spring no higher not my own self," she reflected, "but John may be in any minute, an' if he's agreeable to put out half a sovereign, I shan't say nothing to put no obstacle in his way."

The lady showed no sign of yielding to temptation, but the mother of Tamsin did not on that account give up hope. Transactions of magnitude cannot be arranged all of a moment. Nor did she become silent. Mrs. Airdrie went busily on with her work. All the while Jane Scutt attentively watched and talked. In those early days she could talk by the hour about Tamsin. Little Tamsin stood by and

94

drank in every word. Many a time in after years did she laugh at the recollection of the quaint scraps of information which her mother imparted with such a serious simplicity.

"Have you a large family, Mrs. Scutt?"

"Only this one. We never thought to see she. Fifteen years a wife afore the little maid comed to take a peep at us. An' mother haint a-provided 'ee wi' no company. Have she, Tamsin?"

"I never had a child," said Mrs. Airdrie sorrow-

fully, without looking up from her work.

"'Tis a awesome thing at times to have but one," explained the mother of Tamsin. "I do verily tremble at times. I do. There's that about Tamsin now and again to make a mother o' one quake. I do wonder sometimes whether or no she is made for this world, an' whether she'll ever bide to be reared up. I do truly fear she can't be healthy. Our Tamsin is so wonderful nice and delicate in her mind like."

"How so?" inquired the lady.

"Well she is. A body couldn't never think. Why for days after our Tamsin first took heed to watch the milking, you couldn' get she to touch o' milk. Coax or threaten, not a drop. I had to comfort her in the end, she shouldn' never have nasty cow's milk, but only milk out o' the jug. Mother did. Didn' mother, Tamsin?"

"Poor little soul!" interjected the lady.

"Now I'll tell 'ee true. Where there's but one an'

no neighbours handy, a mother must look for any little thing to amuse a chile an' keep her little mind employed. Besides a child must learn by what she do see, an' by time she's old enough to do she do know. Now back in the cold weather I said to Tamsin, I said 'Father do mean to kill a pig, now you go out an' watch, an' if you be a good little maid, when he do scald un he'll let you help un scrape. Why 'tis the joy o' any young chile's life to help scrape a pig. 'Twas mine I do know. Not she! No sooner did they haul poor chuckey up an' he did squealey—afore the knife was anywhere a-nighst to stick un, mind—than Tamsin must run into house, like a rabbit into a hole, and scream herself black in the face.''

Little Tamsin thought the funny lady screwed up her face as if something was hurting her.

"An' now here's a funny thing—to see the tasty victuals our Tamsin can't never a-bear. Show her black pudding. She do turn from it. Whitepot I won't say. Well say a little bit about so big as a candle end. No more. If so much. Never. Not that. Notlins! She never won't touch o' 'em. Nor chitlins. Nor liver. Nor lights. Nor tripe. Do really make a mother's mind wonder an' fear to think o' it. Because 'tis not to say that our Tamsin's a born fool. 'Tis not. She's most wonderful quick to learn. Tell her but once, she do mind. An' she'll play an' talk to herself morn to night all the day through. She do know all her letters in ABC

book. That she do. Everyone an' point 'em out true, you can't puzzle her. Oh! I tell 'ee, there's times 'tis a awesome thing to be the mother of a only one. Zo 'tis.''

Mrs. Airdrie listened for the most part with smiling attention, sometimes casting a look of kindness upon the child which Thomasine long afterwards remembered. The mother of Tamsin could have spoken of many more wonders, if her husband had not returned to bring her mind back to serious business.

She at once explained the magnitude of her conditional offer.

"'Tis a goodish bit o' money," hesitated John.
"I have a-been offered a picture ready framed an' all for less. Still! I shouldn't so very much mind, not if missus do wish."

Having thus signified his willingness to run to ten shillings, he gazed attentively at the picture, and at once proved himself a frank and discriminating critic.

He pointed at Tamsin herself standing there in

the sunlight.

"Now, look at the little maid's head how you will, the hair is all one colour, so even as a field o' barley goose-necked and fit to reap. There idden no stroke o' white straight along one side o' the crown same as you've a-tookt off. At the chile's age, 'tis not to be expected—neither bald nor grey. But you've a-got it paper white."

He touched the drawing with the tip of his ground-ash stick, and proved the truth of his assertion beyond a doubt. It was impossible for the artist to offer one syllable in self defence. When talking the matter over years later, John Scutt invariably declared "An' she, her own self, couldn' say no ways different."

He was very much taken with such reasonable quiet acceptance of reproof. It encouraged him to push the deal. From the depths of his breeches pocket he drew a small leathern bag, took out half a sovereign and held out the tempting coin on the palm of his hand.

"There. John Scutt's so good as his word, an' there's the ten shilling piece. Now 'twon't take 'ee more 'an half a minute. You just yaller the chile's head. The money's yours, an' missus, I don't doubt, 'ull bring 'ee in a dozen o' fresh eggs next time she do make a journey so far as Eddyford town's end."

In small deals John had often found a hesitating seller grasp at once at the sight of the colour of ready money.

He was disappointed.

"I do not think the drawing is quite satisfactory," replied Mrs. Airdrie with quiet modesty.

To be sure, the finding of fault does sometimes make a seller shy. John felt that encouragement was needed.

"There's nothing in this world wrong about un

except 'tis that. Just yaller the little head o' her—an' I don't doubt missus 'ull throw in a nice tender pullet along wi' the dozen o' eggs."

"But I could not part with the picture. I want

to keep it for a study."

"An' a half pound o' fresh butter."

"It is very good of you, but really-"

"An' a cup o' nice thick cream. I don't doubt but what missus——"

But Tamsin's mother hastened to intervene. John was talking a pretty deal too fast. If not stopped there was no saying where he might go to. Cash in the bag was, and should be always under the control of the man; but pullets, eggs, butter, cream, and all such produce were entirely for her to dispose of.

"I wouldn' go the value of a varden vurder

'an that," she said gravely but with firmness.

"It's really not for sale," said the artist.

That was the end of the commercial side of it. The deal fell through. But Mrs. Airdrie had spent her life in a land of imagination and ideals. The bright little face by her side charmed her. Expectant longing for the little brush at that moment lighted it into a finer spirituality. She divined in the child a sensibility miserably out of place in those rough surroundings however unaffected and honest. She looked with pity on the little Tamsin, as happy a child nevertheless, as any that ran about under the sun. She coveted such a little soul—to teach it—to watch over it—to love it—

"Tamsin must come to Eddyford and spend the day with me," said she. "Then I will make a little drawing on purpose, and she shall bring it home as a present."

The invitation filled the heart of Jane Scutt with pride. The day was fixed without difficulty. Thus, quite in infancy began those visits to gentry which so greatly influenced the development and future of

Thomasine Scutt.

The strange lady, who thus drifted into Hatchbarrow Barton that spring morning and anchored for the day, was the widow of a poet of whom the world has scarcely heard. He won little applause. His reward was the love of those who knew him and admired his work. Just a line or two in the corner of a journal when he passed away—then silence. Yet who can say how far a poet's influence may extend? Who shall dare to set a limit upon the power of any thought that ever yet found expression? All his books held a place on Thomasine's sunlit shelf, and she, the daughter of uninstructed laborious parents, had learnt many of his poems by heart.

And if sincere work is rarely wasted, neither is the starvation of a soul through want of opportunity so frequent a tragedy as one might be tempted to suppose. Help arrives by unknown paths to those who are ready. It is the readiness that is the essential requirement, and finest music

discoursing to a crowd must pass unheeded by all but the recipient ear. Creatures of a kind recognize their kinship when they meet in the wilderness, and pass others without attention. Had little Tamsin been a mere child of the barton, she might have been given a penny to run back into the garden out of the way.

Very shortly after the death of her husband Mrs. Airdrie determined to leave London. She remembered the moorland country, which some years ago they had visited together, and returned to look at it once more. Late in the summer she paid her second visit to Eddyford when the moor was a feast of colour. The purple of the heather was passing into brown, and yellow was spreading amongst the bracken on the hillside. The sparkling river, the soft white mist that hung over it of an evening, the blue distance with sometimes a glimpse of the sea and the quaint old homesteads that sprinkled the solitudes were all in the spirit of her art of water-colour painting, by which she hoped to add a very simple luxury to a scarcely sufficient The little house at the town's end was vacant. It offered the simplicity and quietude for which she longed. She had none but herself to provide for. Her means would just enable her to live in frugal comfort in such a village as Eddyford. Without hesitation she took the cottage and arranged that those numerous repairs should be put in hand at once, so that everything might

be got ready for her to enter early in the following

spring.

She came at Ladyday and had been settled in it little more than a week, when her exploration of the neighbourhood brought her to the door of the solitary homestead which offered such a striking landmark to every part of the moor.

Oh! That first occasion upon which our Tamsin

went out to spend the day!

Jane meant her to be fine then and no mistake. Thomasine remembered well how she was brushed, combed, scrubbed, her hair tortured into ringlets around her mother's finger after having been tied up in rags all the night through. She wore the little white frock made for the last Whitsuntide, and by that time full short, and listened with awe to her mother's parting admonitions impressively delivered. "Now be a good little maid, mind, and be sure you do always say 'Thank you kindly' when a thing is handed, an' not eat too much figgy cake to make yourself bad, an', whatever else you do do, mind to pull up your socks." Then she was hoisted up into the high two-wheeled cart for her father to "drop her to Eddyford," on his way to Netherton-town.

What a day the child spent!

It was a visit to fairyland, and the little Tamsin soon made herself at home. Mrs. Airdrie told story after story, each more beautiful than the last. The

child soon lost all fear of the elderly lady solemnly attired in black. The oval face between the smooth grey hair was always smiling and kind, and Tamsin asked question after question. But when by chance it came to the brownies and the doing of the kitchen work, Tamsin knew exactly where she was. Then she could instruct.

"That's the pixies," cried the child.

"Yes, the pixies."

Tamsin told all the stories after that—stories never meant for her ear, but which she had heard many a time sitting in silence, her basin in her lap, on her little footstool, on one side of the Hatchbarrow hearth. Her parents never varied, and she

could repeat them nearly word for word.

"Peter Jay, the sexton, he were a-catched by the pixies one time out by Conygar Wood. That was after old Abraham Jay's funeral. Old Abraham Jay did well an' left money. There was nothing wanting to show respect at old Abraham Jay's funeral. The men drinkt twice so much at old Abraham Jay's funeral as all what was put out at his brother John Jay's funeral. Though John Jay was one very well liked, John Jay did not do so well in life as what Abraham Jay did. Peter Jay, the sexton, couldn' get drunk to John Jay's funeral; but he stopped last to Abraham Jay's funeral, because to be sure, Abraham Jay when he died, left Peter Jay, the sexton, up two hundred pound, an' a copper kettle, an' his old mare, an' all the bed-

linen. Peter Jay wouldn' ride home the old mare, not that dark night an all, because they wouldn' let un. But he said he might so well carr' on the copper kettle. An' somehow or another, they little pixies led Peter Jay into Conygar Wood, up a mile an' a half out of his road, an' there he tumbled down. An' they little pixies did jump all roun' and did pinch Peter Jay till he did hollar an' blare downright proper. There was they what heard it, what wasn't so foolish as to go up there that time o' night. An' Peter Jay couldn' kick the pixies, because they was so wonderful dapper to hop out o' the way. An' come morning, somebody found Peter Jay, wi' his coat off, all a-lying down along straight in a bed o' sting-nettles, sweet asleep, wi' his head on a emmet heap. But they little pixies at the going off must ha' led Peter Jay, the sexton, all out round like for miles. For the father o' the old Isaac Cledworth, then alive, found the copper kettle, up a week on, up on Eddyford common and smith, he made a poorish job to knock out where he was most terrible a-bulged in to one side, all across, handle to spout."

Oh! Tamsin was a listener to some purpose, though nobody at Hatchbarrow had ever found out that the child's ears were so alert. She could have told half the familiar lore of the moorland. And whilst she talked, her eyes became so big with wonder, that Mrs. Airdrie stopped to look at them. They looked so frank and real between the

little rows of tight artificial ringlets. Mrs. Airdrie laughed as she painted the company ringlets. And yet something in Tamsin's eyes, remote possibilities lying in the very depths of them, made her feel sad.

The child went on unasked.

"There's witches too all so well as pixies. There's they about do say the old aunt Titcomb is a witch. Mother, she don't feel all so sure about that. When a toad do crawl into house that's a witch. You must take the toad up in the shovel or wi' the tongs an' drop un into fire. Then the old witch can't do no more harm. If you don't do that the witch 'ull sure to witch 'ee. She'll come an' ride 'pon your chest every night o' your life so as your sleep is no good to 'ee. But witches can't come and hag-ride 'pon good little girls, if they do never forget to kneel down an' say their prayers afore they do jump into bed.

'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Six angels about my bed,
Two to foot an' two to head,
An' two to carr' me when I be dead.'

When a little maid do say her prayers, the good angels do bide by your bed all night, an' they won't let she witch 'ee, not then, and if you should chance to die they do carr' the little maid straight off to Heabem."

The thought of the horrid cruelty, which the child surely must have seen practised at the homestead to speak of it so innocently, had scarcely time to inflict a shudder upon Mrs. Airdrie, before it was dispelled by the child's implicit trust in the power of that quaint little prayer and the care of the good angels. From habit, and in complete simplicity, Tamsin had put her hands together and looked up as if praying in real earnest.

"Come here, little soul. Can you read?"

"Yes," replied Tamsin with confidence.

Mrs. Airdrie stretched out her hand and took a book from the shelf.

"Girt A. An' that's girt B."

Tamsin met with these old acquaintances on a new page with pleasure, but her only idea of reading was to identify individual letters, and she seemed to know the whole household of them.

"Would you like to learn?"

The answer was a prompt affirmative.

"Would you like me to teach you?"

"Yes."

"Well. We will see about it."

The day passed very happily. Tamsin did not undergo the temptation of fat figgy cake, but it is to be feared the child was horribly neglectful of her socks. Long before John Scutt called on his way from market the presentation sketch was not only finished but dry.

On his homeward way down the village street

he pulled up many times to show how this here Mrs. Airdrie had a-tookt off our Tamsin. Sitting in his two-wheeled cart, he held the picture close beside the child's head and pointed with the handle of the whip to prove that the colour of the hair, verily and truly, was now so near as a touch to a dead-match.

Everybody agreed that the picture was "the very moral o' Tamsin, eyes an' all." Everybody seemed surprised at the completeness of the work. In point of fact, and this was the greatest wonder of all, nothing of really vital importance to the face had been omitted.

"There's her little mouth wi' the little pinch in the corner an' no mistake," said Peter Jay.

"My blessed life! The lady have a-put Tamsin's little sharp-topped nose then, sure 'nough," cried cousin Jane Peters.

Isaac Cledworth, not yet "old" since "the little Isaac" was at that time too immature for public notice, declared that look it over like a man might a horse or a bullock, and, one after another, take point by point like, no man living could find anything left out.

The possession of such a treasure, not only filled the Scutts with pride, but inspired confidence in a stranger whom the parish of Eddyford suspected of eccentricity and still regarded with doubt. Jane readily acceded to the suggestion that Tamsin should go to Mrs. Airdrie to be taught, and as longer days and warmer weather were now to be expected, it was agreed that the education of Tamsin should begin at once.

Oh! Those early days how happy they were. The lessons were so brief, and Tamsin found them so easy. She very quickly learnt to read quite well. They went out upon the moor together, and Tamsin spelling out the long words, read aloud, whilst Mrs. Airdrie sketched.

Legends, poems, the old Hebrew stories, and sometimes the too excellent tales of those days so full of little prigs, in which one child was made to be so incomprehensibly wicked in order that all the others might be taught to become so intolerably good.

They read something of every sort. But the Arthurian tales pleased Tamsin the most, with the pictures of the knights on horseback all so gay and bold. She loved to hear how the queen rode out on the hill to watch the hunting. For had not Tamsin's mother taken her last autumn to the Beacon Head to see the great red stag and the hounds and all the ladies and gentlemen gallop by.

On other days they searched for rare plants on the moor, Tamsin being shown in the botany book the pictures of the flowers she must look for. Since there was no scheme, no examination, and no end in view, except to learn the thing and think about it for its own sake, in the warm sympathy and

simple directness of her kind friend, unconsciously the mind of Tamsin expanded without care or weariness, as naturally as her body grew in the sunshine and fresh breezes of the moor.

After Tamsin could read quite well and was just a little proud of it, she found one day on Mrs. Airdrie's table an open book. She took it up and tried to read. She knit her brows and tried to spell.

Horrible nightmare! She could make no sense of anything.

Tamsin was almost in tears.

That morning Mrs. Airdrie talked to her of other climes, of nations over the seas with other manners and other names for everything. From that day they began to play a little game of asking each other the names of familiar objects in French. Mrs. Airdrie noticed that Tamsin very rarely forgot. So they went on to phrases, and at last could talk together quite easily, and as Tamsin had never been puzzled with the grammar, she made but few grammatical mistakes.

During the winter months, when the journeys to and fro were difficult, the child paid long visits to the little house at Eddyford town's end. They were often kept indoors by the rain. Sometimes for more than a month together the moor might be covered deep in snow. Without horses and taking no interest in sport, Mrs. Airdrie had made no acquaintances in the neighbourhood and little Tamsin was her only companion. Now and then, when the ground

was frost-bound and hunting impossible, Mrs. Pilton took the opportunity to pay a little attention to her husband's parishioners. Thomasine well remembered the conversation on one of these occasions.

The afternoon was cold and the sky hidden behind heavy clouds. Large flakes of snow went drifting and whirling across the window-panes. It was too dark to work, too early to light the lamp. The easel had been put out of the way in a corner. A bright fire of turf and logs was blazing on the dogs. It was one of those hours which they both loved. Mrs. Airdrie would sit knitting whilst Thomasine read aloud as long as there was light enough to see. Then Mrs. Airdrie talked to the child of what had been read. Thomasine at this time was twelve years of age.

"To love everybody, no matter whether they be rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, simply because they are human beings like one's self—to help everybody who needs help—never to be unkind because another is unkind to you—never to be harsh or cruel to any living creature, but always gentle and helpful and kind—that is the greatest wisdom that has ever been taught. To forgive everything, even unfairness, Thomasine, and forget it at once—it is very difficult to understand and believe and many people call it folly. Nobody who is vain and proud ever can believe it—because pride always wants to separate

itself from others, either by riches, or by fame, or perhaps by getting power. What you do, you must do well, your very best, but for itself and not for these rewards. And you need have no fear. If you can find this great love you can never want, because man's real wants are so few. If you can see this truth, you will always be free-"

A sharp rat-tat, on the brass knocker which adorned the front door of the little house at Eddyford town's end, put a sudden end to this instruction. The child drew a deep sigh, for she was listening

most intently.

A minute later Mrs. Pilton entered, bringing with

her a gust of the cold winter air.

Not over tall and rather thin than stout, she was a personage in Eddyford, and in the imagination of Tamsin appeared to fill the whole parish. She came smiling, talkative, determined to be pleasant and quite unconscious of the slightly patronizing air with which she bestowed her company upon a lady, whom she never met anywhere and of whose existence nobody seemed to know. Overawed by her presence, Tamsin was about to go.

"Restez là. Vous aurez froid sans feu," whispered

Mrs. Airdrie.

"You need not go, Tamsin," agreed Mrs. Pilton, benignly.

Then she sat down to talk. Mrs. Pilton was a great talker, and most of all prided herself that she always spoke out her mind. She asserted this

constantly, so there could be no doubt about it. Such frankness made her very popular amongst her friends, because everybody awaited her attack upon somebody else. It may explain also why John and Jane Scutt always remembered her by the nose like a reaphook and the chin like the point of a new moon.

Salutations and amenities having been exchanged, Mrs. Pilton turned to Tamsin.

"Well, Tamsin Scutt. You may think yourself a very lucky little girl that anyone should take the trouble to teach you. I hope you are grateful. Though, I must say, you will be the first grateful person born in Eddyford, if you should prove to be. Gratitude is not indigenous here, Mrs. Airdrie. And that Mrs. Airdrie in her kindness will not spoil you and fill your mind with false ideas. Though sometimes I fear it." She shook her head and turned again to Mrs. Airdrie. "You know, I always speak out my mind."

"But why suspect me of false ideas?" smiled Mrs. Airdrie.

"Not you, my dear Mrs. Airdrie. Perfectly correct ideas become false when they get out of place. I always speak out my mind. I am not in favour of much education for the lower orders. What can they, in their station of life, possibly require? To read, so that they may read their Bibles and Prayer Books, of course. To add, subtract, multiply and divide, so that they may cast

their simple accounts. To write, so that they may send a letter if it should happen to be necessary. More than this, believe me, is positively injurious."

"But knowledge surely can never do an injury."

"By altogether upsetting the mind." Mrs. Pilton raised both hands in expostulation. "And now we are upon the subject, my dear Mrs. Airdrie—French! They tell me this child can jabber French. Of what use can French possibly be to little Tamsin Scutt, a farmer's girl? Unless, of course, Tamsin's parents intend her to go into service. In which case, if Tamsin should be a lady's maid, and it seems to me she may grow up to be personally suited for such a situation, her ability to speak French might indeed sometimes prove quite serviceable to her mistress."

Thomasine remembered that Mrs. Airdrie laughed. "The child is quick," she explained. "She has

learnt a little French as a pastime."

"Believe me, my dear Mrs. Airdrie, simple country people have no need for pastimes. They lead the healthiest lives much in the open air. They have work. They have rest. What more can people in their most enviable position desire?"

"There must, I fear, be instances of mental and

spiritual starvation."

"All their spiritual needs, my dear Mrs. Airdrie, are provided for by the church. Mental needs they can have none, unless we implant them. No, believe me, people are never so happy as when they

keep, or are most carefully kept, in their proper places. And I fear from what I hear in the village—I always speak out my mind—that Tamsin may be receiving a little more attention than can be good for one in her position."

"Well, Tamsin, let us hope no harm will come to you by my instrumentality," said Mrs. Airdrie, and

smiled kindly upon the child.

"Unless—of course—" added Mrs. Pilton, very slowly and distinctly, "you intend—to do something—for Tamsin."

Having warmly praised a drawing on the easel, and in the same breath explained that she knew nothing whatever about painting, Mrs. Pilton presently withdrew.

Little Tamsin, listening from her corner, apprehended that Mrs. Airdrie had suffered rebuke from the great Mrs. Pilton. And Mrs. Airdrie, as was but natural, appeared to be depressed in consequence. There was no more reading that afternoon and no more talk. Long after the lamp was lighted, Mrs. Airdrie sat thoughtful and silent, watching the flames.

Then followed a time during which the child was conscious of being the subject of secret discussion.

About a week after Mrs. Pilton's visit, of a Sunday afternoon because her father would be at leisure, Mrs. Airdrie walked across to Hatchbarrow and talked in the parlour, a room held sacred to the most

important occasions, for a whole hour with the parents of Tamsin. What was then said Tamsin was never plainly told. Perhaps her parents themselves did not clearly understand. But very soon afterwards she was told that she was to go to the boarding-school, and her heart trembled at the thought. On the eve of her departure, Mrs. Airdrie implored her to make the most of her opportunities, and Thomasine worked and learnt, partly because she loved books and found no difficulty in learning, but still more to please the kind friend who was so good to her.

In due course followed successes, prizes and approbation. The parents of Tamsin looked upon

their child as a prodigy.

During those years of school Hatchbarrow became full of mysterious expectations of great things in store for "our Tamsin." Thomasine was quick to detect the unexpressed belief that Mrs. Airdrie would some day "leave our Tamsin money." Nothing was said of this openly or abroad, for Eddyford folk are envious and already laughed at the schooling. Moreover, about anything concerning money the Scutts were secrecy itself.

During the holidays her mother was for ever whispering some little admonition in Tamsin's ear.

"Whatever you do do, do 'ee have a care not to do nothing to affront her," or, "If she should ever speak sharp, don't 'ee never answer back, mind." And when Tamsin declared that Mrs. Airdrie never did so, her mother became more deeply mysterious. "Then mind to keep your eye 'pon her countenance, chile, to see whether she do take a thing favourable or no."

Mrs. Airdrie's name was rarely mentioned. It had given place to an impressive "her" or "she."

Tamsin remembered how her father would sit in his chair of an evening and make strange calculations based on "her" necessary expenditure, rent, taxes, service and housekeeping, seeking to arrive at some conclusion as to what the least "she" could have must be.

"An' she's not the one to lay out every penny, I'll be bound," he reflected.

And a moment later-

"Besides, she can't go to Lunnon twice a year, same as she do, without money. There's the journey two ways, an' Lunnon dear as fire."

By the term "money" used without qualification Tamsin's father always meant "wealth."

Although Thomasine was awake to these hopes, she was young and light-hearted, and they occupied small place in her mind. As she grew and learnt, the sympathy between her and her solitary friend became always more deep. As her understanding increased their love became more intimate. With a touch of jealousy, Jane Scutt sometimes spoke of "she" in a tone almost slighting. "Make haste, then. Go on. Run on in and see your second mother," was the farewell with which

she often dismissed Thomasine for Eddyford town's end.

Thus the time passed, alternating between school and holiday, but yielding no incident that left any deep impression on the mind of Thomasine, until about three years before, of an Easter, she came home to Hatchbarrow.

The festival was late that season. The daffodils and the japonica were again in full flower, and another brood of goslings ran at the tail of the old goose in the barton. She spent the Sunday in Eddyford with Mrs. Airdrie, and after morning church they took a steep winding path through a wood on the coombe-side to climb to the moor on the top.

They walked very slowly, and at the first turn of

the path they stopped.

"Give me your arm, child. You will very soon be a woman now. Why, you are as tall as I, Thomasine."

The buds were everywhere breaking into green leaf. Only those on the ash remained black and winter bound, and they glistened on their shining twigs silver-edged in the light. Many of the singing birds had returned.

"The chiff-chaff! Stop again, Thomasine! That must be our old friend of last summer come back to the same place."

It seemed to her that Mrs. Airdrie made excuses

both to stop and to prolong the pauses. When at last they reached the moor she sat down to rest on the dry heather overhanging a bank. She was breathless with the climb, and some minutes elapsed before she could speak.

"I am not sure, Thomasine, that I shall be able to live much longer in Eddyford. I have not been strong this winter. You know I have just been away. I wanted to get advice. My friends wish me to go back to London. They say this country cannot suit me. I fear I shall have to obey."

Thomasine remembered with shame her inability to make any reply. At first, too overcome with the fear of losing her friend, she scarcely realized that Mrs. Airdrie was speaking of her health. Then she tried to express her sorrow, but stammered and could not. It seemed so unkind, so unfeeling, to find herself thus altogether tongue-tied. Even that morning she blushed at the recollection of it.

Mrs. Airdrie understood, took her hand, warmly pressed it and held it in her own.

Presently, in a voice low and sweet, she began to speak. There was in her manner an earnestness so impressive, an affection so profound, that Thomasine listened spellbound.

"I have been thinking of you very much of late. Surely it can never be possible that your life may be the less happy for having met me! The thought troubles me. Believe me, Thomasine, though it is difficult to believe it, all happiness comes from

within. Neither wealth nor fame nor anything material can bring it, though the whole world around you should be under the delusion that it can. I have seen it for myself. There are two things worth having, child—a simple mind and righteousness. With these there is nothing can do you any real harm. They are wings to surmount any misfortune or disappointment that life can bring. A simple mind suffers no self-deceit. And right doing cannot inflict real ill upon you, if it should demand everything that you have. I have been rich and full of wants, and very, very poor and contented. But all this is a hard lesson and takes a life-time to learn."

Mrs. Airdrie paused. Emotion had rendered her more breathless than climbing the steep hill. With the tip of her umbrella she described little circles in

the sand of the wayside gutter.

"You might have been happy if I had never seen you, or had left you as you were. The life is simple and honest. But your little mind was so quick. It charmed me and won my heart. From the moment when you prattled about pixies and witches and the toad, I could not leave you without help. When you come home next time you will leave school. You will have to decide on the future. Under any circumstances, first of all I hope to take you with me to London. We will talk to my friends about something for you to do. If you choose it, Thomasine, we will carefully prepare for

it, so that you may do it well. If I go back there, you will be like a daughter to me. If you remain here, still your happiness is in your own hands. Only with simplicity do what is right and you will find it within yourself. Whenever you do wrong sooner or later you will suffer 'In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.' Do right and what you have learnt will be a joy and a resource to you. Otherwise, after all our talks, you will only have piled up a little heap of knowledge without increase of understanding."

She had become very emphatic. She drew Thomasine towards her and kissed her. Thomasine noticed the strange blue colour of her lips.

Then she rose from their seat on the heather.

"Come. We must be getting on. You must be hungry, child."

They returned through the wood by the way they had come. No more was said of the future. Mrs Airdrie regained the quiet cheerfulness which was habitual with her. They were happy together all the afternoon, and in the evening Thomasine went back to Hatchbarrow.

The plan for Thomasine's life was never considered, and some time before the summer holidays Mrs Airdrie had left Eddyford.

Just as the soft twilight came creeping over the hills at the end of a sweet day in May, she

returned from a sketching excursion, sat down to rest in her easy chair and dropped into the sleep from which none ever awakes.

She had no property—only a small income which passed away at her death. She had no debts. A short will left all her effects to Thomasine. The legacy consisted only of books, drawings and furniture.

With tender sentiment, Thomasine had sought, as far as possible, to arrange her room on the pattern of the sitting-room in the little house at Eddyford town's end, where she had spent so many happy hours. Thus came this little oasis of culture under a roof beneath which the life was almost primitive. It was even more alone than Hatchbarrow surrounded by its moors.

Very soon after the death of Mrs. Airdrie began Thomasine's love for Philip—at first, a secret that she almost feared to admit to her own heart. Then came the joy of his avowal, and the promises made in the little street of Netherton town.

Now another step was taken.

"Mrs. Pilton will never give consent," she said aloud.

Thus her mind was brought home from its wanderings to the place from which it had started. Whatever was good for Philip that she must do. She loved him far too well to have any doubt as to that. But to leave the old people, and cross unknown seas, even with Philip, was to mingle sadness in the cup of love.

The more she looked at it, the more reasonable appeared her idea that Philip might farm under her father's guidance. Old Parson Pilton farmed. Why not his son? Thomasine decided that, by the exercise of a very deep diplomacy, she might find out what sort of figure a gentleman farmer appeared in her father's mind, without in the very slightest degree awakening his suspicion. There could be no breach of faith in that. No harm could come of that.

"But Mrs. Pilton will never give consent," she repeated more emphatically than before.



BOOK III. THE REVENUE OF DOUBTS AND FEARS



CHAPTER I

THOMASINE'S DIPLOMACY

HAYMAKING came and passed with only a sprinkle of rain, and John Scutt insisted, to the annoyance of Jane, that the almanac, though now and then right, was more often a liar.

Philip rode over on business more than once during haymaking and, as any townsman is glad to do,

stayed to help save the hay.

Once he arrived of an evening on foot, on a legal errand so unconvincing, that John and Jane winked at each other huge winks, terrible convulsions, almost as disturbing as earthquakes, and then, with excuses obvious as the winks, went out and left the young people together.

But nothing fresh happened. There was only

the old tale to tell.

They did not speak of Mrs. Pilton, but the arguments of Thomasine caused Philip to see that farming in England might be not altogether a bad thing.

In the matter so near to her heart as the settlement of Philip as a farmer somewhere near Hatchbarrow, Tamsin made up her mind to act with the deepest

subtlety. She must watch for a moment when weather had been lucky and the day's work had gone well. Then, of a leisure evening, with her father in the best of spirits, she could bring round the talk to farming and, without mention of Philip's name, or awakening any suspicion whatever, learn all that she wanted to know.

At last came harvest, the most glorious harvest in the memory of Eddyford, with a sun as bright as summer.

All day long heavy loads came creaking home to the mow-barton. Ruddy cornfields changed to pale stubble, and one after another the stacks arose on the other side of the garden wall. John Scutt had got hold of the thatcher. That was a source of great delight to him. It was a busy season, with everybody's work coming at once, and he might have had to wait. Now somebody else was waiting, which was a far better arrangement. John Scutt was greatly pleased with himself in this matter of the thatcher. When he went out and when he came in, sure enough, there was the thatcher, perched up upon his ladder against the yellow straw. Getting served first is the sort of triumph to make a man proud.

Yet Tamsin waited long. More than one opportunity did she allow to pass before she found courage to speak even secretly of a matter so close to her heart.

There came a quiet afternoon in the work at

Hatchbarrow. The last piece of wheat had been cut and the sheaves, set up in stitch, stood in even rows across the square field on the hillside, only waiting for to-morrow. Hatchbarrow teams were away, "lending a hand to neighbour Cledworth," who was "a bit behind to year." But John Scutt had stayed at home, and whilst he set ready the vacant staddles for the last stack before Harvesthome, he carried on a running talk at the top of his voice with thatcher Joyce mounted on the ridge of the new-made mow close by.

"A mow more to year than ever afore I covered to Hatchbarrow in all my life," cried thatcher

Joyce.

"Do want un, too," John Scutt affected to grumble, though his face was glad, "to make up for two years agone when the sheaves stood out an' rotted in the rain."

Thatcher Joyce was not a scholar. He was only a grey-headed man of gifts. Everybody around Eddyford admired to hear him "discoose," by which was meant talk at length with some sense at the back of it.

Thus wisdom came shouted from the top of a stack.

"Now what I do say is this. Bad years mus' come. Zo tes. Zo 't have ever a-been. Zo ever shall be. Such the plan—from creation to the end of the wordle. Now, mark me! What I do say is this. Catch hold when you can. What God

A'mighty don't send man can't have. But when God A'mighty out o' his Heabem above do pour out the hand o' plenty, let man stand by below to hold up the bucket ready. Missed is lost. Past is gone. If not garnered—never called back. But this I will say, Mr. John Scutt don't let much slip that his fist can close upon."

Tamsin in the garden, picking her lavender, saw the thatcher on high thrust in a spar and hammer it home with uncommon vigour, as if he were clinching his argument.

She stood up to listen, for she liked his talk.

"I can't a'bear to see waste—never couldn't," cried her father.

"No man need bend his back to pick up what you do let drop, John Scutt. An' yet folk do wonder at your wealth. But Lord! Other things besides kittens be born blind. An' there's staid folk in this parish, to my mind, wi' their eyes not yet open to sense."

"There's some most terrible slack-twisted farm-

ing about, I do allow," agreed her father.

"Now what I do say is this. Life is all o' one piece like, take it all drough. The slacker the man to work the slacker the tongue to grumble. 'Tis a hard world for the lazy, look at it how you will, for they alone have a-got eyes to mark where the faults do truly lie. Oh! Ay! they be the grumblers in good right. 'Tis none but they have a-got time to look into the shortcomings o' God A'mighty

proper well. Now what I do say is this. There's one above. Mus' be. We be below. Who can doubt it. An' times an' seasons be the same for all mankind."

In that old dogmatic manner of his, which left nothing more to be said, John Scutt summed up the whole matter.

"A man can do well enough at the farming—if he do only take advantage o' the weather, act wi' sense—an' work."

Here, then, was her father giving an opinion unasked to the question she feared to put. If she could but catch him now, before the thought was gone, it would be his, not hers. Tamsin dropped her lavender, laid her scissors on the window-sill as she passed, and ran towards the mow-barton.

At the gate she almost bounced into her father coming away. He was smiling and very pleased. The stacks, thatcher's appreciation, the wonderful summer crowned with an abundant harvest, now so near upon completion—everything was lucky and well.

John Scutt greeted his daughter with boisterous good-humour.

"Hullo, Tamsin! Here you do come—head first—full butt—as folk do say. Where off then?"

"Where are you off?" returned the girl.

"Why, to look at to-morrow's work, to be sure. Where else?"

"I'm on the same errand."

"What work have you got—you little bit of a chiney ornament?"

"Why, to walk up and see about hauling my

wheat, to be sure. Where else?"

Tamsin laughed at him—even mimicked his short

way to his face.

John Scutt dearly loved such little quibbles with Tamsin. He gave a great guffaw, and shook his head and looked at her with an affectation of surprise at her impudence.

"Come along then, farmer. As much yours as

mine, maybe, for all I do know."

Side by side they started down the lane.

"I should like to be a farmer," said Tamsin.

John Scutt held up his finger in warning.

"Ah, you'd pretty quick end in workhouse."

"Not at all. Many women have been very good farmers. I should take care to hold up the bucket to the hand of plenty. I heard what thatcher said."

"Tamsin, my chile. I do hear what they do all say. There's a deal o' soft soap about thatcher. But their praise don't suck your father in. When folk do talk, Tamsin, I do listen so close that I can most times hear the thought behind."

Tamsin smiled within herself.

"But everybody else says the same as thatcher that you've done better, father, than anybody around here."

John Scutt almost frowned.

" May be."

"Now would that be because you know more than the rest, father?"

John Scutt's frown melted into a smile. Really, now, our Tamsin was a maid with a wonderfully innocent way of her own.

"That I can't say, chile, my own self. That I must leave to the rest. But I do aim to do all I

do know."

"Could you teach anybody else to do as well as you?"

"I don't quite see what you do mean, Tamsin."

Determined to make the point clear, Tamsin became slowly and clearly argumentative.

"Well! A man can grow rich at farming—because you have. If that is because you know more—you could tell another. If you had a neighbour to whom you wished well, if you were to give him advice—the best advice—why shouldn't he do quite as well?"

When secretly amused, John Scutt had a way of half closing one eye. He did it now.

"He'd never take it."

"But if he did?"

"They never do, Tamsin, my dear. The bigger the fool the more nogheaded an' the more pigheaded."

"But I did not mean a fool, father," answered the girl quickly. "Say one clever enough to know that he did not know much."

"But show un to me first, Tamsin. If there is one about such as you say, he ought to get on. Why not?"

Tamsin walked on in silence, constantly repeating in her heart her father's question, "Why not?"

They entered the wheat field and wandered amongst the sheaves. Truly, this would be better for Philip than a dingy office in a town. Her father laughed once more, called her farmer, and inquired when she was going to haul. Tamsin told him the first thing in the morning, for the trumpery weed was all withered, the straw dry, and the berry full if not over-ripe, and might have been stacked a week agone.

"I rather blame myself for being a little slack," said she, imitating the stock excuses she had so often heard. "But there! At harvest time and fine weather something must go on one side. It must. A man can't be everywhere. Something has to be left. It has-it must, when so many things come all at once."

John Scutt roared with laughter. He delighted in such comedy.

"You must wed wi' a farmer, Tamsin, my dear, and then you can advise."

Then it was Tamsin's turn to shake a finger at him.

"Ah! what did you tell me? If I marry a fool, he won't take it. But, father, if he should take it. what will he be?"

"I'll come along an' whisper in your ear what to advise, Tamsin."

"You must wait until I find him. Then you can

teach him yourself."

"If he should have land and not knowledge, I'll teach un like a son, Tamsin."

"When people once get talking what nonsense people do sometimes talk," reflected Tamsin, with ever so little a pout of discontent.

"Talking's a pastime, chile. An' there's no

harm in a laugh."

- "And to think that all this should have grown out of thatcher's nonsense. It is really laughable after all. Because, of course, if I had thought a minute, old Parson Pilton did-farm his glebe, as everybody said, wonderfully well. And he couldn't have known much about it when he came here. Could he?"
- "Nothing at all. One o' these college chaps. Grew up in the country—no doubt."

"Who advised him?"

"All the parish. I did-mostly."

"Did he make it answer, father?"

"First rate. Only he was such a one to spend it afore he had it in hand like."

"Did he look after it?"

"Like a hawk. To be sure, he never put his hand to plough. But, there, the value o' one pair o' hands is soon counted. Old passon was for ever casting his eye about. Ho! ho! He looked after

that flock, whatever happed to t'other. He did well. Passon did."

"Then that clearly proves," said Tamsin carelessly, "that thatcher was right about the grumblers. It is strange what a little thing will set one's mind thinking—and all about nothing, too."

"That's true," agreed John Scutt.

He stopped to set up a fallen sheaf, and then stood rubbing his chin between finger and thumb, apparently listening with thoughtful enjoyment to the rasping sound made by the stubbly growth of his unshorn beard.

"Yet there's a difference in men. To be sure—Passon Pilton—well—he had the gift——"

He paused and thoughtfully rubbed his chin again. Suddenly he turned, looked Tamsin straight

in the face, and spoke quite gaily.

"Now, young Master Philip. There's one could do it. He'd get on better at the farmering than ever he will at the lawyering—ha! ha! I'll bet a guinea he would. I could see that when he was over here in the hayfield, and when he came t'other night. I do like Master Philip. I should dearly like to show Master Philip."

Tamsin turned away, picked an ear, and rubbed out the wheat between her hands. Here was an answer to her thoughts direct and plain. Yet her father had spoken so spontaneously and everything had followed in a manner so natural that Tamsin walked home happy in the assurance that all was well and her secret well kept.

But John said to Jane:

"Our Tamsin is no better 'an a glass bottle. She's bright as a crystal in herself like, but 'tis easy to see the colour o' what's inside. Her mind do shine through she, so clear as the blue stuff in the girt vase thing in the 'pothecary's window into Netherton-town. She an' Master Philip be o' one mind. He do want to go a-farmering an' she do hold wi' it. She flushed up redder than any poppy that ever grew in corn when I did but speak his name, by chance like, looking at the wheat. Sound her, missus. Take a quiet moment and sound the maid."

CHAPTER II

DEEP SOUNDINGS

THE efforts of Jane to sound the maid, although frequent, were not attended with any conclusive success. The thought of Master Philip as a mate for Tamsin was never absent from her mind. When alone she muttered to herself about it over her work. When asleep she dreamed of it; and often lay awake at night, turning the matter over and over again, like hay in showery weather, and sighing, whilst John snored.

She had none of the secrecy and cunning that John had learned at market and fair. It must be admitted that Jane's efforts in diplomacy lacked finesse. Her finest ruse was but a slow-going affair, as obvious as a waggon and team with bells climbing a hard road up a high hill. Tamsin merely stepped out of the way with a superior nimbleness of phrase. More than once Jane shook her discomfited head and, with a sigh, informed her husband that "a body mid zoun', an' zoun', an' zoun, but never fathom the bottom o' one so deep."

Yet Master Philip's supposed love for Tamsin was the one gleam of romance in an otherwise

laborious and matter-of-fact life. The wish for it was not inspired by social ambition. Both John and Jane were too plain and independent for that. It was Tamsin's good that her parents had at heart.

In Jane's experience love was little more than a rough-and-ready wooing, speedily terminated by a ceremony in the parish church. Then everything ended except hard work. But Tamsin was one apart. Heated by admiration and love, the imagination of Jane dimly pictured a passion and a romance more rare—the exceptional love of the old ballad song, in which the squire or the lawyer meets the humble shepherdess and proposes to her out of hand; or the other, wherein the maiden, having loved too readily above her station, is deserted, sings the song of the willow, and dies. These old folksongs, even when telling the most improbable story, have their roots deep in human nature.

In her secret heart Jane perceived that any joy, any sorrow, might fall to the lot of a wonder like Tamsin.

Jane's heart sank within her to see that Master Philip was not prompt. In her young days there was no such a lag-about lover as he. It was off or on then, sure enough. True, he came once or twice with some sort of lame excuse about the property. But these professional visits of Philip had ceased some time ago. On Michaelmas day John rode into Netherton-town to complete the purchase of Hatchbarrow and came home more merry than

wise. There was an end of that matter. The days shortened. Tamsin was more often indoors. Jane's eyes followed the girl's every movement, and it seemed to her that the sunny mirth of Tamsin was also giving way to a night of thought. But Tamsin knew that Philip could not get to Hatchbarrow by daylight, and she had not seen him for several weeks.

The purple of the heather had passed away from the moor, and the bracken, once so green, was yellow and ruddy brown. An early frost had cut off the most tender of the flowers in Tamsin's garden. Harvest-home had just come and gone, with a festivity not so important as the sheepshearing, but leaving a deal of clearing-up behind it.

Mother and maid were busy at work in the old

kitchen.

"The Beacon Head is lost in a misk, an' what the day do mean to turn to is ver'ly an' truly more 'an mortal man can tell."

Jane brought this information when she came back from the faggot pile hugging a double armful of logs to her bosom. She set the sticks up in a corner of the chimney to dry ready for use. Her apron was green from the moss and lichen on the wood. She stepped across to the window, set her arms to rest a-kimbo, smiled upon her daughter with real affection, and prepared to sound.

When Jane Scutt rested from her labours to look upon Tamsin, as she often did in a pause between any two household duties, her whole countenance underwent a change. Her anxious eyes brightened. The careworn lines upon her lean forehead softened into gentler curves. For the moment she would cast off her weight of responsibilities, and the hunted look gave way to an expression of satisfaction and love. Jane gave over sighing. Her firm lips even quivered with a half-humorous smile. For it would have been necessary to find indulgence for some of Tamsin's ways if she had not loved her so much. It was early in the afternoon, and Tamsin, in her usual pale blue pinafore, but with a pair of old gloves on her hands, was standing at the table board, in the light from the small-paned, leaded window, scouring a pewter platter. The heart of Jane leapt with pride. She had never seen Tamsin look so wonderful pretty though her heart did harbour a doubt as to whether all was well.

"There, chile! Let be. You've a-done enough,"

said the mother in a coaxing tone.

"I like doing it, mother. And if I don't do it, I know who will."

"What, then? I shall have time. So give over now to once, Tamsin, my dear."

"Thomasine, mother."

"Very well, then-Tomsin, I should say."

Jane laughed as pride and affection made concession to the girl's strange preference for her full name.

[&]quot;But why should you, mother?"

"And why should you, my dear? I was bred up to work. Work do come natural after so much o' it. 'Tis no trouble to these old paws. But wi' you, 'tis different like. Lauk! Tamsin—Tomsin I should say—if I didn't know I bore 'ee, I couldn't half believe 'ee mine. 'Tis as if any old blackthorn bush out in hedge should bear a primerose, as mid say. You be the very heart an' soul o' the place, here to Hatchbarrow. You be. I do really quail to think o' 'ee sometimes. As if I must some day lose 'ee."

Tamsin made merry.

"Mother!" cried she, "All this fear about me is

nonsense. I'm as strong as a horse."

"I didn't mean health. Nor I wasn't a-thinking if you should wed, my maid. But if you should ever truly see how rough we verily be. Say no more. There! Let be an' have a-done. T'ull go on as 'tis maybe so long as your father and mother do last."

The eyes of Tamsin opened wide with surprise. Her mother seemed to speak with some deeper meaning and in the tone of awe with which her superstition sometimes recognized an omen of ill.

Jane saw at a glance, and hastily set herself to remove the impression that her words had so evi-

dently made.

"What I do mean is this—you can never make fine gentry out o' your father an' mother, my maid. Rough we was, rough we be and rough we always must be. 'Tis to be hoped we sha'n't stand in your way. I should like to see 'ee wed. Though when we be gone, you can live a lady out o' the rent o' Hatchbarrow. I wouldn' have 'ee to live alone. So go an' sit down an' read your po'try book or your story book. I do like for 'ee to read your po'try book. You can read un out if you be aminded. Why, you do colour up when you do read your po'try book more rosy than anybody from hard work."

"There'll be time for the book by and by, when the candle is lighted, mother."

"Take it now, child. Take it now. There'll be none too much time, if some gay young lover should find 'ee a house o' your own one o' these fine days." Jane had suddenly become quite lively, for she was just ready to heave the lead.

"You think of that more than I do myself,

mother."

"'Tis my fear, Tamsin—Tomsin, I do mean—that you won't take who you might, an' that our rough ways 'ull scare off the finer bird that might prove a mate to catch your fancy."

"He won't do for me, mother, if he's so timid as all

that."

"I don't say timid, only-"

Jane paused to put her thought into comely shape. She could by no means get it quit so neat as she wished and she shook her head.

"All same time he might look at a couple o'

scarecrows like your father and your mother, and think twice."

"Oh, mother! Surely I should be well saved from any who could look at me and think more than once," laughed Tamsin, and merrily rubbed the platter.

"Yet, all same time, there's folk might look

down on other people's folk," Jane reflected.

"Not a tongue on earth, mother, can say a word against you and father."

Then Jane sighed her everlasting sigh.

"That's all very well, but say somebody—well, say anybody—say Master Philip now, for the sake o' saying somebody——''

"Mother! Master Philip is the very last I should

say."

"Oh, Tamsin! Tamsin!—Tomsin, I should say—you never will talk serious. I didn' really say Master Philip. Say anybody you like——"

"Then, mother, you must wait for somebody I

do like."

Finding herself thus defeated at every turn, Jane stepped forward to seize hold of the platter.

"Give it here. Give it here this minute," cried

she, with a show of authority.

They laughed and struggled, but Jane's strong grip was soon victorious. She pushed Tamsin into a chair and then prepared to take a still deeper sounding.

"You do turn things off-but for all that-there

is they that—look at it how you mid—do an' will——"

The rattle of hoofs on the stones of the barton yard cut the poor woman short at the very moment when she was about to be both clear and impressive. Then a lusty voice shouted:

"Hullo! In house there—where's our Tamsin?"

"There's father," cried the girl.

She ran out of the door. More nimble than her mother, she passed through the garden gate and was by the upping-stock, and the milk pails on the wall ready for the evening milking, before Jane was halfway down the path. John Scutt had cantered in from the farm. The sturdy little Exmoor pony stood up stiffly under his weight. The wise-looking brindled sheep-dog walked slowly to his corner between the mounting steps and the wall. John was roughly dressed, but not in the tarry shearing suit. There was a button missing from his old gaiter, and his jacket had seen so much weather that it seemed to have taken on the browns and greens of the soil and the field. In the moorland landscape at this autumn season of the year it took a quick eye to distinguish John Scutt.

He had ridden home in a hurry. His voice was loud as always when he spoke out of doors, and he

shouted in short, abrupt sentences.

"Hullo, Tamsin! In you go! up an' change yourself. Hop into Netherton-town. There'll be thick fog—maybe for days. Hop on. T'ull be

a change an' a holiday. 'Tis no good to 'ee here—wi' your weak chest. On to go. There's a good maid.''

The girl's face brightened. She should see Philip and might talk to him for hours. For there was nobody in lawyer Marshall's silent old house but his one daughter, her friend Isabel. Philip would come in from the office and they would have the little sitting-room all to themselves. Isabel would see to all that. And the time had been long since the last sea-fog.

Her mother came up, a little out of breath.

"But what do you say, Jane? 'Tis a thick cloud away there over the sea. But you can see for yourselves."

Her father pointed with his riding whip in the direction of the beech trees which sheltered the homestead. Across their reddening leaves a thin grey mist like a film of smoke was already drifting. It could be distinguished more clearly still against the darker branches of the clump of firs.

Her mother hesitated in a way that Tamsin did not understand.

"What do 'ee say?" repeated her father more sharply than before.

Standing between them, the girl glanced from one to the other.

Jane was very slow to answer. Her husband's eyes were fixed intently upon her, and she returned his gaze with a look of pleading inquiry. Tamsin detected an almost imperceptible nod. Her mother responded with a slight movement of assent. Evidently there was some secret understanding between them-something regarding this visit which she was not to know. Her mother's face puckered with anxiety. The tardy reply came with constraint, like something said only to save appearances because a listener is present.

"If such is your wish, John."

"That's it. Get on then, maid. 'Tis a goodish step to Netherton-town. Come. Be sprack!"

The girl wanted no urging. Happy as a linnet flitting to its nest in the gorse, she ran down the garden path and disappeared within the porch. A moment later John Scutt caught sight of her before the little mirror in the window above. But Tamsin, seeing her father glance that way, drew back at once. She was perplexed at what she had seen. She could not believe herself mistaken. The window was open. She peeped between the curtain and the looking-glass. Her mother had stepped forward, and was standing close by her husband's stirrup. Although Jane's whisper was of the loudest, he bent down his ear. His voice, when he endeavoured to speak softly, gave to alternate words the penetrating power of a foghorn.

"To-night, John? Do 'ee suppose?"
Likely enough. There's a cloud so big as a mountain arising up over to the west. It'll be black as a bag on the moor after dark."

"I thought o' fog last night, I did sure, when the sun went down so red," sighed Jane. "I dreamed of it too. But la! I can't a-bear it—to see the maid a-sent off into town on a tale like this."

"Pack o' nonsense! Can be but for her good. She'll reap the benefit."

"Yet—still—there, my heart do sink when I do think o' her sometimes. All her thoughts an' ways be so right an' we be so double. Day an' night I do wish her well wed and settled—an' safe. An' that's a fac'."

"Well. This is the way to it. She do take—Netherton-town—" His voice sank and rose again, and the ear of Tamsin could catch little more than a word here and there. "—willing an' ready—cat to cream. Who do know?"

He glanced at the window. To Tamsin his lips appeared to shape a warning that he could see her peeping at them from behind the blind. At the top of his voice he shouted, "Good-bye, Tamsin," pulled round his pony, whistled up the dog and clattered out of the yard.

Slowly Jane turned back towards the gate, her head bent as if it carried a burden of serious thought. Seen from the window, she was a pathetic figure, full of weariness. "Poor mother! she is always thinking of me and Philip," said Tamsin to herself. She longed to go and tell her that all would some day be according to her wish. That Philip loved her.

That she loved Philip. That they would marry, come what may, and perhaps even live near to Hatchbarrow. But she dared not do that. She said to herself, that, sea-fog or no sea-fog, she would not go to Netherton-town that afternoon and leave her mother who looked so woebegone. Yet with these thoughts in her mind she hastened all the more to get ready.

Certainly Tamsin was not long. Still in the kitchen at work on the pewter when her daughter came downstairs, Jane stopped to look at her. The

woeful, pleading look was still in her eyes.

"I don't want to go into town to-day, mother."

"Oh! but you must. Your father'll be vexed," urged Jane, in alarm. "He do think so much o' your chest."

"That's all nonsense," cried the girl.

"Maybe. 'Tis his thought, an' go you must. Besides, you do love to go," and, brightening up amazingly, Jane turned Tamsin round about in admiration. "'Pon my life, you do look nice. There be two o' you, Tamsin—two maids, sure 'nough, in one skin. There's Tamsin for your home, an' Tomsin, by the same token, for Nethertontown. 'Pon my word, you be smart."

Although autumn was passing and much leaf had yellowed, there had been no more than an early morning frost, and this sea-mist came to blot out the clear blue sky of an Indian summer. And summer still lingered in Thomasine's attire. Her

bodice, of the colour of the reddened beech leaves, was partly covered by a pale silk kerchief almost the hue of the new thatch on the mows beside the homestead. The sleeves came but little below the elbows. Her skirt was short, revealing crimson hose of her own knitting, and the neatest of ankles above stout leathern shoes with bright steel buckles. Such was Thomasine of a holiday or when she went to Netherton-town.

"That's right. An' your cape to carr' 'pon your arm," said her mother, looking her over with complete approval.

Refusing to be led into further talk, Jane led her daughter to the door and started her on the way. She afterwards stood in the porch watching the distant hill, where the winding road again came into view over the moor.

CHAPTER III

TO NETHERTON-TOWN

THOMASINE walked briskly. She had eight miles before her—over the moor, down the coombe-side, by the bridge and through the straggling village of Eddyford, over Netherton Common and thus into Netherton-town.

Thomasine was excited. Her mother's soundings might have passed almost unheeded, but since there was some secret understanding between her parents the matter was of more importance. If her father had really discovered her secret, as their nods and their whisperings led her to fear, it was by no fault of hers. She had kept her promise to Philip most faithfully. Some tattling body in the village, knowing of his visit, must have said some word by way of joke and set the world talking. That was likely enough, and would not have mattered a pin but for Philip's wish. Thomasine only feared the tale might get carried to Netherton-town. There was no worse place for gossip in the whole world than Netherton-town. Everybody knew that. Just a word let fall of a market day and the whole countryside was soon humming. Somebody might have

spoken a word already in her father's ear. To confer together and hold silence concerning anything of importance was the way of her father and mother and characteristic of the moorland folk, though they were boisterously open about all that did not touch them closely. From their reserve it was clear that they approved. They could express disapproval loudly enough and at once—and indignation also, if they should fancy themselves slighted or hurt. Should they once get it into their heads that Philip was trifling, there would be what her mother called an "upstore." If anything of this sort were to happen, Philip must surely think her a very shallow and unreliable person, without wit to conceal her thoughts.

In spite of these misgivings, the heart of Thomasine was exuberantly glad. She was on the road to Netherton-town. She was on the way to meet the man she loved. Everything was happy and beautiful on the way to Netherton-town, from the hare that lopped across the track to the seagulls, like Thomasine herself, passing inland. Thomasine sprang to the roadside to pick a sprig of belated heather still in flower. A string of ponies, a score of them at least, each one a mare with a sucker running by her side, came in single file along the slope of the coombe. They stopped, whinnied at the sight of her, then of a sudden made up their minds and crossed the road in front of her at a canter. Thomasine shouted to them from very

joy as they galloped away down their track between the heather, through the green swamp and up the opposite hill. They, like the seagulls and herself, were changing quarters because of the seafog. And yet, to look at Thomasine, her eyes bright with anticipation, her cheeks aglow with the exercise both of mind and body, none could have suspected that she need tramp eight miles to get away from a mere mist.

Full a mile across Eddyford Common and Thomasine did not meet a soul.

The village of Eddyford straggled along the banks of a river that rushes hurrying down from the moor. Thomasine could hear the hum of the waters before she could see the stream. Enclosed fields, both grass and arable, reached up the hillside. At the end of the moor the rough open road, shut off by a gate, passes between hedgerows and becomes a winding lane. Close by the gate-post and hanging over it grew a large hazel bush. A bent old woman, in a dirty sun-bonnet, muttered to herself, as, by means of a crooked stick, she dragged down boughs to pick ruddy clusters of nuts from amongst the yellowing leaves. On the ground, by her feet, was a small cross-handled basket half filled with herbs.

Thomasine recognized the old aunt Titcomb at a glance.

The old aunt Titcomb was the wise woman of Eddyford, and many people believed her to be a witch. Perhaps she was neither wise nor a sorceress,

but only cunning enough to make the most of her reputation. For nearly half a century, before she became too old, she had been the priestess both of the cradle and the coffin, for every village that hung around the skirt of the broad moorland. Many a strange occult rite had she performed. The old aunt Titcomb not only carried a headful of wonderful and secret things, but a wide experience had taught her much of human nature. Her means of living puzzled everybody. Some said she must be half starved. Others that she had money hidden away and ought not to be allowed parish relief. But with her old age she had found a shrewd and bitter tongue, which feared neither high nor low. The rich encouraged her for the sake of hearing her talk. The humble were careful not to offend her for fear of what she might be able to do. So she did and said as she liked. She had known Thomasine from the moment of her birth, and she had a way of talking with astounding freedom to those whom she had assisted into the world. The village people only laughed. Thomasine shuddered to see her. A most blood-curdling coarseness oftentimes, and now and then a most horrible profanity, fell from the lips of the old Titcomb. But she was busy with her nuts. It might be possible by walking quickly to pass unobserved.

The gate creaked on its hinges.

The old hag stood up, glanced around, and tried to straighten her back.

"Hullo!" cried she, with a laugh, thin and harsh as the creaking of a worn-out wheel. "Here's another of my own beauties. Ha! ha! Tamsin Scutt. Zo here you be again off to Netherton-town. Can 'ee guess the reason why they do send 'ee, Tamsin Scutt—an' o' sich a misky day, too?"

The girl started. As she put the question the old aunt's voice dropped to a sly whisper, and it

came so pat upon her thoughts.

"La! You do turn your head zo quick's a robin, Tamsin Scutt. Your folk do tell up as how you be weakly. But to look 'ee in the face, who'd ever think it, Tamsin Scutt? An' never had herb, drink nor ointment from the wold aunt Titcomb since the day o' your birth."

There was an irony in this frequent repetition of the name, which was most uncomfortable. The old woman hobbled forward, and with her thin brown

finger tapped on the girl's wrist.

A grey eye, watery, shrunken but cunning, peered from under a bushy eyebrow, and Thomasine had

not the courage to move.

"Here! Looky-here, Tamsin! One o' my own. Do 'ee ever wake, full early in the morning, wi' a bit of a cough?"

"No. aunt Titcomb."

"Do 'ee panky much if you should chance to step out pretty quick up hill?"

"No, aunt Titcomb."

"Nor spit blood?"

" No."

"Nor sweat o' nights? But don't speak another word. I'll warrant you don't. For you be one o' the lucky ones, Tamsin Scutt. One by yourself, an' never a one to follow as the old aunt Titcomb could ha' taken oath. So, to be sure, they must take good care o' 'ee, Tamsin Scutt. Your mother can't afford to lose the only one. An' to watch how your vather have a-got on! A little better 'an nothing, same as most o' the rest about here—an' now the farm his own. The lawyer Marshall bought un another piece o' ground last month, didn't 'er? 'Tis wonderful. Zo 'tis. An' work night an' day, night an' day to save money for the only one. You be the apple o' both their eyes, Tamsin Scutt. You'll bring money to the man you do wed. Do 'ee ever wonder why they do send 'ee in to Netherton-town, Tamsin Scutt?

The old woman had gradually drawn nearer still. Her neck was craned forward, her face came so close that Thomasine could feel the breath against her cheek. Her voice was little more than a wheeze.

Thomasine drew back.

"I—I go in to visit my friends," she replied, quickly.

The old aunt Titcomb showed her toothless gums and laughed.

"Ho! Ho! An' so you do," she nodded.

The answer seemed to fill her with merriment

and she had to stop and regain breath before she could proceed.

"Ha! Ha! An' in hopes o' one more than a friend, maybe. Harky here, Tamsin, my sweet pretty maid. A word in your ear. Don't 'ee loiter about too long in Love Lane. Get to church, my maid, so quick's you can. The ring on your finger, my dear, that's the thing. There's a planet against 'ee, Tamsin Scutt, lucky as you be. Till death us do part—that's a maxim for a maid wi' money. Troubles do come thick as weeds. Money do vleeall to once-whir-r-r-like a flock o' linnets. Death us do part is the only rock. Here! Here's a riddle for 'ee, Tamsin Scutt. When is dark night more open than daylight? Can 'ee guess? Ho! ho! I'll warrant you can't. Ax o' the owls up in Hatchbarrow wood. They'll hollar who-o-o. Turn tail now, an' run home an' ax o' your vather. Tell un the wold aunt Titcomb send 'ee. Mid be all zo well. Then tell up the answer too-when another do lie in wait."

Impatience with such nonsense overcame her fear. Thomasine found the will to speak and be free from the nightmare that oppressed her.

"There's no sense in what you say, aunt Titcomb," she said, sharply, and stepped aside to continue on her way.

The old woman hobbled in front of her.

"Then you won't take a errand from your old aunt?"

Thomasine did not answer.

"Youth is proud. Maybe you be right. Be proud while you may. There's no pride in crooked limbs and wrinkles."

The old aunt Titcomb stood back and allowed her to pass. She did not, however, cease to talk, but gradually raised her voice to its normal squeak as Thomasine walked away. Louder and louder it grew, following the girl all down the road. Thomasine hoped that no neighbour from Eddyford was near to listen.

"No more there is, my dear. There's no sense. No sense—in young or old. Young thoughts must run love-seeking. Old will be for ever a-woolgathering. Now, I'll tell 'ee why they do send 'ee into town. You be a beauty, Tamsin Scutt. Under a head like the furze in flower lips do pray to be kissed. You be a primerose, my dear. They do hope one o' the town-some gentleman born-mid chance to pick 'ee, Tamsin Scutt. An' why not, wi' the land an' a bit o' money? Why not Jane Scutt's maid a lady, so well as some of the rest? Keep on your way. You be one o' my own. I do wish 'ee well. Don't forget now, don't forget. Ax the riddle for all that. He'll make your vather stare a bit-I'll warrant un. So good-day, Tamsin Scutt. You be one o' my own. Good-day! I do say Good-day!"

For the sake of silence Thomasine turned her head and cried back, "Good-day!"

"One o' my own—one o' my own," mumbled the old woman as she picked up the basket and hobbled

away to her nuts or her herb-picking.

The girl hurried down the hill towards the village. This unexpected interview had disturbed her greatly and she was distressed in mind. In vain she tried to reassure herself that this was only a silly old woman. The old aunt Titcomb had spoken as one who knows what she is talking about. Towards the last, in her way, she had been almost kind. Yet many people called her witch, and superstition was in the blood of Tamsin. Jane Scutt believed implicitly in the evil eye. Her father always spat three times, if he should be unlucky enough to meet a piebald horse on the road. The roots of these beliefs lie deeper than the surface ploughing of a superficial education. There are scholars who feel their flesh creep at a ghost-story, even though they do not believe in ghosts. And the wisdom of the old aunt's utterances, whenever they happened to be clear, seemed to menace a more certain misfortune in the warnings which were so obscure. "There's a planet against 'ee!" "Till Death us do part." These dark words cast a shadow that dispelled the gaiety of Thomasine. Her mood was changed. The joy of Love gave place to its no less natural apprehensions. Philip's mother would never consent. It would never come to anything. There would be talktalk before it was wise. He would blame her and grow cold. His friends would dissuade him-when

it was known. And it was known already. Her parents knew. The old aunt Titcomb knew by some means or the other. All Eddyford knew—likely enough——

She reached Eddyford and saw with pleasure that there was no loiterer on the bridge. Thomasine was in no humour to speak to any soul alive. Eddyford was not reticent, but apt to indulge in disagreeable jokes or to be inquisitive and ask plain questions straight out. She walked quickly up the street, but was fortunate enough to meet no intimate friend.

She came to the house where Mrs. Airdrie had lived, now tenantless and falling out of repair. Since her death it had never been let, and now the windows were boarded up. Thomasine was already unhappy and in distress. She burst into tears and hurried on her way.

Yet all was not over. A little beyond the village was a small thatched homestead, the dwelling of cousin Jane Peters, that excellent spinster, middle-aged and so talkative. Cousin Jane Peters lived in frugal independence and therefore had little to do. Her afternoons she devoted to needlework and was always seated at the window. Nobody could be more inquisitive as to your errand than cousin Jane Peters. No eye so keen as hers to detect the state of your health and the condition of your mind from your countenance. Sure enough, scarcely had Thomasine passed the door, when

cousin Jane Peters, with uncle Jeremiah Brook close at the tail of her skirt, popped out and shouted after her with the utmost good humour.

"Hullo, Tamsin! Why so quick? London afire,

maybe! You be in a hurry then!"

"I'm late! I'm late!" cried the girl, looking back over her shoulder.

"You be proud-proud, seem so."

" I'll look in on my way back."

"Oh! Don't 'ee trouble, if you should be in haste, sure. So fine as you be."

"I must speak. To pass your near kin without greeting is to show bad manners and a base mind."

Thomasine kept on without stopping, and presently the door closed with a slam.

Thomasine had committed the most unpardonable offence known to rural life. She had appeared stuck up. She had given the go-by to a poor relation. In a village news is always scarce, and everyone a-hungering for the sound of a fresh voice. Cousin Jane Peters was not only disappointed but incensed. She would never forget. Yet Thomasine had as little false pride as a girl with money might. She understood, and was vexed. Vexed with cousin Jane Peters—with herself—with everything. Nevertheless she could not bear to talk to anyone that afternoon. She kept on to the point where the road parts company with the river to climb the opposite hill.

Thomasine heard a voice as it were come out of

the sky—a rough voice that called to a team. High on a slope of the hillside she saw a man at plough. His back was towards her, but she knew that tall figure only too well. She quickened her pace,

hoping that she might pass unobserved.

Again she heard him call as he turned the plough at the headland under the higher hedge. Now he faced her way as he came down the other furrow. The homestead of the Cledworths was hidden in the coombe close by, although an outlying field or two of their farm lay beside her father's land at Hatchbarrow. The village street was well in view from any part of the hill. She could scarcely hope to miss his eye in her brighter holiday attire, but Thomasine drew into the side, and, wherever it was possible all up the winding steep, kept well under the cover of a tall beech hedgerow.

She began to take courage. She had almost reached the top.

A minute more—yet another turn of the road—and she would be in safety.

"Hullo, Tamsin! Here you be. Out to look

roun' for your sweetheart, then."

The face of Thomasine reddened with anger. Education had taught her to detect impertinence where the village of Eddyford would only have found good humour. She did not see the speaker, but full well she knew that drawl and hated it.

The young Isaac Cledworth had left his plough and run down to a gap in the hedge. He knew that

if Thomasine should see him she would turn back, and there he stood, out of sight amongst the leaves, waiting for her to come by. In leathern gaiters and a kirtle smock he lightly jumped from the high bank over the fern-covered ditch and stepped into the road. The place was lonely and the way little used. Thomasine was afraid. She cast a hasty glance up the hill and down. Nobody was in sight. There was no help for it. She had no wile by which to escape him this time. She needs must stop and hear whatever he might have to say.

"I can't tell what you mean, Isaac Cledworth, I'm sure," said she, trying to conceal her fear under

a careless manner.

"Why, who but myself, to be sure?" The young Isaac spoke with that air of jaunty self-satisfaction which had won so much admiration at revel and fair. "An' met me you have, then, sure

'nough."

In the eyes of the moorland folk Isaac Cledworth passed for a very smart young man, and more than one girl in Eddyford would have thought herself lucky to wed with him. Ready at any moment to drink or work, or fight or wrestle with any comer, he had gained for himself a considerable popularity in that country. Although but four-and-twenty, he was as 'cute at a deal as many a one whose crown was bald with over-reaching his neighbour. And many thought him not so bad-looking, with his tall, active figure, his straight sandy hair, grey

eyes, short nose and long upper lip. As the champion of that part of the county, Isaac was welcome at any homestead within ten miles, as they say, "on any day of the week," and in consequence fancied himself as a wit and humorist.

"Don't make such a fool of yourself, Isaac Cledworth," cried Thomasine in a fury, and with a step to one side as if to go on her way.

"Stop! Stop, my beauty!"

He laughed, and still in his humorous vein skipped in front of her as if dancing a reel.

"There's none such hurry. 'Tis my turn now. You can't hop away here into the crowd, as you did last year at Eddyford revel, my maid. Nor give me the go-by as you have done many a score o' times. Nor run out o' house an' hide yourself away from the dancers, as you did at your father's sheepshearing. For here we be, Tamsin, my maid. You an' I, that do love 'ee better 'an life. Look here, Tamsin. Look here, my dear. Will 'ee ha' me?'"

"Never, Isaac Cledworth."

"Look here, Tamsin, my beauty. 'Tis better to wed wi' one o' your own sort—you do know. We be neighbours——"

"An' neighbours is all we can ever be, Isaac Cledworth. I've made it plain many a time in deeds if not in words. What other meaning could I have? If you would only have the sense to see! Now I tell you—for once and all."

"I do love 'ee dear, Tamsin, my maid. I'd take care o' 'ee, my dear." He wrung up his fist as if to show how well. "Look here! Will 'ee ha' me?"

"I can quite well take care of myself," retorted the girl sharply. And seeing she could not go forward, she turned to go back to the village.

"Don't you be sure o' that, Tamsin. There's nothing like a good stout arm and fist to take care of a maid. Let but another look at 'ee—I'd—I'd——"

But Thomasine scarcely heard. She was hurrying down the hill.

A fierceness of jealousy was added to his brute's passion. Stung with the recollection of how many times she had eluded him, he saw her trying to escape again. The very futility of the attempt quickened his blood. He strode after her. She heard his steps and ran. In a moment his arm was around her. He forced back her head with his rough hand, and kissed her cheeks again and again. He thrust aside the kerchief and kissed her neck and bosom, until Thomasine in a frenzy seized his yellow hair above each ear and thrust his head away from her.

"You vixen! You little red-headed she-devil!" cried he, with a grim humour but between his clenched teeth. Yet he was exultant and grinned as he smoothed his ruffled locks.

The burning of his polluting lips upon her breast,

and he within arm's-length, Thomasine stood breathless between shame and fear—her lips parted, her face towards him, because she feared again to turn her back and run.

Then the absurdity of having his hair pulled struck the young Isaac Cledworth. He was used to give knocks and to take them smiling. After all, a deal of roughness went to the Eddyford idea of successful wooing. And Tamsin, looking so handsome in her anger, was helpless as a sparrow in his hands. The young Isaac Cledworth laughed aloud.

"Not but what I do commend 'ee, Tamsin. Above everything in life I do like to see 'em game! Look here, Tamsin. What's a kiss? You must all make a fuss, we do know. I do love 'ee true. I never will be rough wi' 'ee. Take and ha' me. I'll love 'ee so gentle as two wood-pigeons. Will 'ee ha' me?"

e na me!

"I will tell my father," she panted.

"'Tell my father,' says she. What if Isaac Cledworth should be your father's choice? Look here, Tamsin! If your father do tell 'ee to ha' me—will 'ee ha' me?"

Before Thomasine could frame an answer to a question so absurd, far below them the head of a horse came nodding round the bend of the hill, then the four-wheeled van, then the Netherton tranter following a step or two behind, ready, stone in hand, to clap it under the wheel when the moment came to give his horse a rest.

It might be five minutes before the carrier could slowly journey up to them. But Isaac Cledworth saw that for this time his wooing was over, and cursed. Thomasine was again to elude him. To see her re-arrange her kerchief and regain her self-possession, now that some one had come within hearing, made him furious with disappointment and jealousy.

Suddenly he burst forth with a torrent of threats,

meaningless and wild.

"Your father! Tell your father? Go an' tell the little black-headed fellar in the drab cloth gaiters, that do walk 'ee out into Netherton-town. Go on into town and tell Master Philip. You who do think yourself too good for folk about here. But you'll never marry un, Tamsin Scutt. Unless you can marry now afore sundown, you never can marry un. You never will. An' you never shall marry un, so sure as God's in heaven. There'll be no two ways about it. You'll wed yet wi' Isaac Cledworth. So there!"

"You talk like a fool," cried Thomasine in her

security.

He pointed towards a bank of cloud above the horizon in the direction where of a clear day the sea was to be seen. It had imperceptibly drawn much nearer since she left Hatchbarrow.

"Maybe. Can 'ee see anything away out there, Tamsin 2"

"I've got my eyes, I suppose," said she angrily.

"That's vog. That's a sea-vog. Your father or any man hereabout could swear to it. We shall get it afore night. An' I can see the other coming so clear as I can see that vog. You'll wed wi' Isaac Cledworth, my fine maid. An' there's nothing 'pon earth can stop it."
"I'd rather be in my coffin."

"Not that! There's a better place than a coffin for the likes o' you. An' you'll seek it. May be soon. May be a month. May be to-morrow. But come 'tis bound to, sure as the light. An' you'll seek it. Tamsin Scutt."

"Seek it?"

"Ay-seek it. I said 'seek it.' "

The creaking cart was drawing near. Isaac Cledworth glanced at it, turned hurriedly, cleared the ditch, and went back to his plough by the gap through which he had come.

Again the tranter stopped to give his horse a rest. Thomasine took the opportunity to hasten on her way. The country was rough, the roads bad and heavy-laden wheels got over the ground little faster than a traveller on foot. Thomasine made haste to get far in front whilst he laboured up the hill. At the top of the steep the tranter would be certain to offer her a lift. He must have seen her talking to young Isaac, and was doubtless already provided with half a dozen sly jokes. Thomasine with her tear-stained cheeks had no wish for company, and did not want to ride.

Now that she was safe, her thoughts went back to Philip. Everybody knew of her love for Philip. Her parents, the old aunt Titcomb, and the young Isaac Cledworth had spoken of it outright. She must tell Philip as soon as possible. In her agitation she walked so fast that she kept in front of the slow-going carrier, until at last she looked down upon the slate roofs and blue smoke of Netherton, a small market-town lying deep in a valley and almost hidden by trees.

After all these misadventures and agitations un-

expected happiness was awaiting Thomasine.

In the distance a young man came loitering upon the road. He looked up, saw her and quickened his pace. He was neatly dressed in a dark-blue swallow-tailed coat with bright buttons. He wore breeches with a fob, from which, by a black watered silk ribbon, hung a seal. Isaac Cledworth was right when he spoke of drab cloth gaiters. Philip wore them in the town. They were long, with buttons close together, and fitted as elegantly as a glove.

"Philip!"

Yes. Philip was coming to meet her.

He was hastening towards her. Thomasine slackened her pace to regain her composure and still further to arrange her ruffled feathers. Moreover it was wise to let the heavy van go lumbering by, putting the tranter safely out of sight under the square shelter of his tarpaulin tilt. There was not another person in the whole landscape.

But Philip was there. He was with her. His arms were around her—his kisses on her lips.

Thomasine forgot all her troubles, all her anxieties. Though all the world might know, for the moment, at any rate, her heart was at rest.

And Philip had never been so joyful.

He had so much to tell—so much that was wonderful, even incredible—that he did not notice any traces of her recent distress. From the first his talk became a rapid monologue, with only now and then a pause to take breath.

This was what Philip had to tell.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT PHILIP HAD TO TELL

"THOMASINE, my dearest angel! So I was right. I knew it. I was certain of it. It was an inspiration my coming to meet you this afternoon, though everything was arranged for me to come to Hatchbarrow the day after to-morrow. I overheard Isabel ask old Marshall whether it would rain. He solemnly looked out of the window and said it was only a sea-fog. That word was enough. From the very moment sea-fog was uttered, I knew it. It was magic. I saw you—absolutely saw you, darling, coming along this Eddyford road. That was just as the clock struck twelve. Kiss me, Thomasine, love. I sneaked out of the office and came. I have been waiting all the afternoon. Again, sweetheart. For, Thomasine, dearest, you will never in this world guess what has happened. My mother has consented—deliberately, spontaneously, unreservedly agreed, sanctioned and consented. For some unimaginable reason old Marshall has stood my friend. Oh, Thomasine, best and dearest, I am so glad that all troubles and petty annoyances are over. You have been so patient and so true.

Give me your hand, love. No. The other, silly child. Isabel told me that a diamond between rubies was the real thing. Do you like it, Thomasine, dearest? Yes, Old Marshall! A man whom for years I have daily stigmatised as 'ass,' 'prudent ass,' 'silly ass,' in fact every variety of ass, which, of course, was contradictory, impossible and absurd. He has a lot more sense than ever I believed. He has told my mother that I am no good for the law. One cannot help respecting discrimination such as that. He said we should marry in spite of her and she had better consent. There's foresight. The man is a seer. And it is a duty to venerate the gift of prophecy—when one unmistakably meets with it. He recommended that I should go farming. He pointed out that your father had made a lot of money. And Court is now to let, and he has the letting of it. You know Court, that beautiful little old manor-house, now a farm-only four miles from Hatchbarrow. He says if my money is not enough, that can easily be arranged. And my mother has consented to everything. I told old Marshall to his face he was a brick. It's not a legal term. He looked pained. If your father thinks it wise, we can settle on Court at once. Oh, Thomasine! Thomasine! Do you see what that means? Do you really understand it, sweetheart? If you will, we can marry before next summer. I have to go to Taunton to-night. Assizes to-morrow. And I'll come to Hatchbarrow

on the next day. And, Thomasine, I want you to go home to-morrow morning as early as you can. You can announce everything to everybody now, of course. But I do hope you will not happen to see my mother before you go. She might explain herself out of her obvious duty. Let her come to Hatchbarrow. She knows Hatchbarrow. She's been there often enough. Let her do the right thing. She has talked a lot of nonsense. I'll drive her over. And, Thomasine dear, I will come over towards evening. I may be a little late because of these beastly assizes. Meet me on the beacon, dearest, in the afternoon. We'll go down together. We'll talk everything over with your folk. Make it right with your father—and all that. He is certain to like Court. They say it is much better land even than Hatchbarrow. And before next summer, dearest! Think of it, Thomasine. Before next summer! Never to part! Think of it-"

Such great happiness, coming all at once on the top of so many woes! Thomasine could only think

of it with tears.

CHAPTER V

THOMASINE'S RETURN

AT Netherton-town the following day was bright and clear. When Thomasine looked out upon the morning, from a window of the lawyer Marshall's house, everywhere behind the sunlit chimney-pots she saw a sky of cloudless blue.

Sea-fog or fair weather at Hatchbarrow, Thomasine was restless with eager anxiety to get home. Her friend Isabel, full of excitement at the turn things had taken, swallowed an insufficient breakfast with imprudent haste in order to accompany her on the first mile of her way.

Thomasine felt shy of the road by which she had come into town. Isaac Cledworth would still be at plough in his large arable ground on the side of Eddyford Hill. Cousin Jane Peters was for certain looking out of her window, and the old aunt Titcomb might be abroad in search of her herbs. Although the only other way was longer by two miles, Thomasine crossed the river by a bridge far below Eddyford. Then, by a track little better than a sheep-run or one of the paths made by the wild ponies, almost hidden beneath a rough

overgrowth of heather, she at last reached the road across Eddyford Common.

Thomasine not only started early, but she walked fast.

She laughed as she went.

Now her mother's mind would be at peace! Poor mother! So full of hidden anxieties! And so good! Now her father might indeed have the teaching of Master Philip. How surprised he would be to detect the hidden meaning in her talk! She had heard her father praise the land at Court a hundred times. He would be proud and glad indeed to do his best with it. And next summer—before next summer—

Oh! what a crowd of things to think about! And nothing quickens the pace so much as happy thought. And, besides, there was no time to waste. Her head was full of plans for to-morrow. She and her mother would have to work. The house must be put perfectly neat and straight. She would make it everywhere gay and beautiful with the last of her autumn flowers. The spare room must be got ready. Everything settled, of course Philip would stay the night. Oh, yes! Her mother's mind would be at rest—except about the cooking and the cakes. Her father would have to put on his new holiday suit, and his white stock, and—

Thomasine went on arranging these things over and over again, in a brain that could neither cease

nor tire, until, the happiest girl in the world, she mounted the last billow of Eddyford Common, and came in sight of home.

She must needs rest a moment on the brow of the hill to draw breath. At once her eyes sought the dear old homestead where she had always lived so happily and from which she no longer feared to part.

Suddenly her gaze became intent.

The old house surely presented an unusual aspect. She knew every feature of it so well, and the significance of every trifling detail, that the slightest change was at once noticeable. To-day it was a familiar countenance, wont to be full of joy and welcome, unexpectedly bearing a strange expression.

It faced the south. The sun was shining upon it, yet the whitewashed walls between the flowering creepers stared irresponsive and cold. The upstair windows, doubtless closed against the sea-fog, had none of them been opened to the clear morning air. The place looked lifeless and uninhabited. So far as eye could detect, no thin wreath of blue smoke, such as from morn to night was visible against the dark pines even when the fire was low, was arising from the chimney. Still more astonishing, the front door was shut—the great oaken door studded with nails, and so well sheltered by the porch that it stood open summer and winter, rain or shine, until work was done for the day and everybody was

in from field or dairy ready to gather around the hearth.

Thomasine stood perplexed.

She made hasty guesses and cast them aside with equal haste.

Her father and mother must have gone away for the night and had not yet returned. A ridiculous proposition and quite impossible! To be sure, they would not be expecting her that day. No visit to Netherton-town had ever been so short as this one. But what of that? How could they possibly leave the ordinary daily duties without arrangements discussed and planned long in advance? Then Thomasine remembered the mysterious signs which her parents had made to each other just before her departure, and all her fears of yesterday came back. Could this absence from home have been foreseen? Had they sent her away without speaking, so that she might not know of it? But that was absurd? They had never in their lives been away together. Besides, there was nowhere for them to go-

Casting aside such futile guesses, Thomasine ran down the hill, her eyes all the while fixed upon the homestead, watching for some sign of life. Nobody moved by the barn or amongst the mows or between the sheds and the stable. No poultry was to be seen in the barton or scratching amongst the short hay beside the ricks. The fowls, shut up at night for fear of the fox, had not been let out.

She ran up the garden path.

The front door was not locked nor even latched. Creaking, it swung open under her pressure, and Thomasine went in. The house was silent, and bore every appearance of having been left empty in great haste.

The wood upon the dogs had burnt through and fallen upon the hearth on either side of a heap of white ashes, from which the glow had died out. On the table-board was a loaf, a piece of cheese and an empty cup; as though her father had snatched a hasty meal before going away at some unexpected hour. She called, but no answer came. No logs had been brought in. None of the morning household work had been touched.

Thomasine fetched turf, stirred the ashes for a red ember, built the half-burnt logs together, and blew them into flame. At the sound of the bellows a step came slowly to the top of the staircase, and her mother called:

"Who's there?"

"I, mother. Where are you? What can have

happened? Is anything the matter?"

"You, Tamsin? I didn't allow you would be back so quick. I didn't hear no sound o' wheels. Where's your father?"

"What wheels, mother? How can I possibly know where father is?"

"But ha'n't 'ee met wi' your father?"

" No, mother."

"He drove from here more than an hour agone—all in haste—to Netherton-town—to fetch 'ee home."

"To fetch me home?"

"Ay. Wi' the bay mare an' cart."

"Why? What for?"

"What! Ha'n't he told 'ee nothing?"

"I have not seen him."

"Then why did 'ee leave?"

"I wanted to come home."

"Then how did 'ee come?"

"I walked. Not through Eddyford village, but by the other way."

"Like enough. My poor head is all to a mizmaze. He would have to go through village wi' the cart, I do believe."

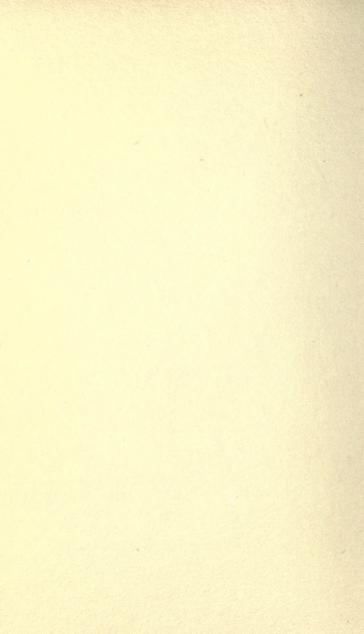
Thomasine ran to the staircase. "But what's the matter, mother? Are you ill?"

"No, no. Stop—stop, Tamsin. Stay where you be. You can't come up. I can't have 'ee to come up."

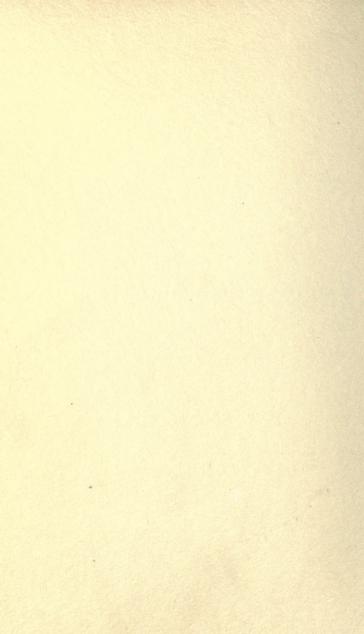
"But what is the matter, mother?"

"I'm a-feeling none too well, chile, I do believe. Stop there an' put it straight a minute, Tamsin, my dear. Get out some victuals for yourself. One must take in or sink. Make up a fire—a good fire, so quick as you can. Put on the kettle to make me a few broths. You'll find it all to do, Tamsin, my dear. You can't come up. I'll be down."

Perplexed and distressed beyond measure, Tamsin obeyed.



BOOK IV. THE REVENUE OF TROUBLE



CHAPTER I

CONFESSIONS

THE fire was blazing and the kettle steaming before Jane Scutt came down "into her house." She had wrapt her shawl about her, but she shivered as she walked across the stone floor, and, as if for warmth, seated herself on the chimney seat in an inner corner of the hearth. Thomasine looked at her mother in fear and wonder. In the few hours since yesterday she had become thinner than ever. The lines upon her face had deepened. She moved as if tired to death, and sat bent like a feeble old woman. Her forehead and cheeks wore a hue of yellow that peered through the habitual tan which summer had deepened. Her clothes were creased and rumpled. Her hair was dishevelled and her cap on one side. Thomasine could see at a glance that she had not been to bed that night.

"I didn' think, chile, you could be here for hours yet, or—or I should ha' put things a bit straight for 'ee. I went up for an hour to lie down in my clothes. We had company last night. Yes—company that did bide about most terr'ble late. I couldn' get to sleep. I couldn' close my eyes a

wink all night. The young Isaac Cledworth and his father, old Isaac Cledworth, the tithingman, they dropped in—yes—they dropped in."

"Young Isaac Cledworth!"

Thomasine uttered the name with disgust. Even with the knowledge that all was happily and beyond all misgiving settled with Philip, a fear, something of a superstition, troubled her at the recollection of

young Isaac's threats.

"Yes, yes. But I do quiver like a leaf. 'Tis the fall maybe an' the blackberry season. Not man nor woman nor beast is so well along the blackberry season, or so the old folk used to tell. I must boil myself up a few herbs for a bitter drink, I do suppose."

"Let me get out the brandy, mother."

"No. No. I shall be better in a while-

"Or maybe wi' the damp o' the fog an' all I've a-catched a chill."

Suddenly the voice and manner of Jane Scutt changed. She gave over whining her complaints and ceased from guessing at her ailments. Her face even brightened, and she spoke with a warm enthusiasm which, however, did not carry the true ring:

"But, Tamsin, my maid, I say! Really an' truly now! Tamsin! The young Isaac Cledworth, he is a fine young man. A smart young fellow as ever walked, Tamsin! An' wonderful good company, too, as all the world do know. But—but

there, I didn' want anybody here—and—and——"

"What is it, mother? There is something more

behind. Something you are not telling me."

Jane Scutt hesitated. She rocked to and fro on the chimney seat, staring at the flames as if not daring to look her daughter in the face. She moistened her lips to speak and yet remained silent.

"What is it, mother, I say?"

Alarm was added to impatience in this insistence of Thomasine.

"You never thought much o' the young Isaac by your ways back at the sheep-shearing—and by words you let fall, Tamsin, now and again—or so I——"

"Mother! What can that have to do with their coming?"

"You've never a-done quite justice to the young Isaac Cledworth, Tamsin—you——'

"But what are you saying, mother? Speak out!"

"He's a neighbour, Tamsin. Our nearest neighbour, my maid——"

At this repetition of the young Isaac's only argument Thomasine could no longer doubt the purpose of last night's visit. But that her mother should favour the suit was most astounding.

"Oh, mother! Say not a word more. For pity's sake!"

"An' he've a-catched a wonderful mind to 'ee,

as everybody hereabout do know. So he an' the constable—well, old Isaac his father, the tithingman, I should say—walked across late last night to speak wi' your father an' make offer for 'ee, Tamsin——"

"Oh, never-never, mother."

"Think twice, my maid, think twice. He's the vittiest young fellow in these parts—ay, for twenty mile round." As Jane went on, her eagerness grew with every word she uttered. "An' his father do own a bit o' land that do lie next to ours—to your own that will be—an' there's more to be bought. Think twice. For he do love 'ee, Tamsin, my dear—he do love 'ee most wonderful well. An' if you've a-set eyes on young Master Philip, 'tis nothing, Tamsin. For 'tis but a folly an' a vanity, an' 'twill come to nothing. An' your father was all for it, all for it, when he came to listen to what they said and think—""

"But you, mother? You could never agree—Oh, mother! You? Not you! Oh! I'd rather be dead. I've told him so. I'd rather be in my

grave."

"I must hold wi' your father, Tamsin, my dear, when I do look at it in the right light like. More 'an that, your father have a'most so good as promised. You'd never go again your own father, your own father an' your own mother, who have a-worked for 'ee all these years an' no other thought. An' your father rode off to find 'ee. For they'll be

here to-morrow, after work, just at dark, for your answer."

"Answer! But, mother! Mother dear! You know there could be but one answer."

"Ah! But you'll say 'Yes,' Tamsin. Say 'Yes' 'ithout question an' 'ithout many words. For God's sake say 'Yes' an' seek no further, Tamsin. Question it no more—when you do see how your father's mind is bent 'pon it. An' your father always so good—so good an' indulgent—to us both. You do owe it, Tamsin. You must owe it. Master Philip is nothing. 'Tis but a dream, Tamsin. An' maybe a rough waking. For 'tis better to marry near home—close near home. You must see that. Think o' your mother, Tamsin chile, an' raise no words. A love fancy is but a passing whim at best. 'Tis better to wed wise. I did hope at one time that you should marry in the town. But no! No! No! I couldn' a-bear to lost 'ee an' let 'ee go to strangers.''

The appeal went to Thomasine's heart.

So many weeks of thought bestowed on going abroad—unwilling as her consent to it had been—the recollection of it arose to accuse her of ingratitude. But that was past. Everything was to turn out happily.

"Cheer up, mother. You are not going to lose me. So you need not take the part of young Isaac

after all."

Thomasine had seated herself upon a low-

bottomed chair in front of the fire, and her hand was hidden in the folds of her skirt. Moved by this impulse of affection, she held out her arms towards her mother. The gem on her finger flashed in the firelight.

"What's that?" cried the woman.

"'Tis a sign, mother, that the young Isaac is a day too late. Even if I could find it in my heart, which I never could, to wed with Isaac Cledworth, I have promised another. That was why I came home so soon. He is coming to-morrow evening to see father—to see you both——"

Jane Scutt leaned forward and interrupted in an

eager whisper:

"Who is it? Not-not-not Master Philip!"

"Yes, Philip."

"Master Philip! Master Philip!"

She sat upright and held up her brown hands

high above her head.

"Oh God! Oh! My God! That it might have been looked over but for that once. An' then we had a-promised to one another and a-swore to do no sin no more for ever."

Very quickly she remembered herself and turned to reason with Tamsin.

"But it can never be. It can never come to anything. Never think it, Tamsin. Old hooknose'll never agree——"

"Mrs. Pilton has agreed, mother."

"But that's only her sly way. Have no hope,

Tamsin, my dear. They've a-got little or nothing. 'Tis long afore a lawyer can earn to marry. She'll get roun' un. She'll worm a way roun' his mind like, an' you'll be left.''

"No, mother. He is to give up lawyering. He'll take Court farm. And he wishes to marry

before the summer."

Jane Scutt moaned and sank back in the chimney corner. At the same hour of yesterday this had been the dream of her life. John and she had talked of it openly after the departure of Tamsin. Within the kitchen was a silence so complete that Thomasine could hear the click of the ash falling from the half-burnt log. Years ago, when the child was quite young, seeing her so nice in her ways, they had cherished something of a prophetic anticipation that the maid would marry above her station. They had slaved for it. Loving money, they had never begrudged the penny that Tamsin might go fine and smart. Jane had prayed for it, too, in secret, if the truth were only knownprayed in fear, with the knowledge and burden of her only half-repented sins upon her soul. And now the silence was broken by sobs. Tears poured down the gnarled, weather-beaten face. Moreover the woman's heart perceived a tragedy in which for the moment she forgot both disappointment and fears. She looked on Tamsin, and with a tenderness never to be suspected in one so primitive, so rough, she faltered a question,

"Do 'ee love un, Tamsin, my dear?"

"Dearly. With all my heart and soul, mother. And he loves me."

The girl's simple, plain avowal of love touched some responsive chord in the bosom of the woman who had borne her. In her imperfect way Jane Scutt understood.

"Poor lamb! poor lamb!" she murmured.

Dazed, helpless, broken and dumb, she turned away and sat staring into the fire. Once she tried to speak, but there came only a distracted muttering. Again, driven to it by fear, she began: "Oh! Tamsin, chile, there's that behind that——" but suddenly checked herself and drew back into the chimney corner again, affrighted at what she had been about to say. But for ever the truth is present, and must be faced. There came a sigh so deep that the heart of Tamsin trembled. Then Jane found herself. She sat up, erect, stiff, hard as a carved figure in a stone niche.

"Tamsin, my dear! 'Tis so well to know it first as last. Your father is so bent on the young Isaac that he'll—he'll never bend his will to gie other

consent."

A calm had also fallen on the spirit of Thomasine.

"Then I shall marry Philip all the same. His mother is none too pleased at the thought of it, though she has given way. But he would have stood true and married me though all the world were against it. We talked of it many times. We

knew what we should do. We should have met in Netherton-town. We should have married by licence in some place far away—and nobody would have known until after. I am almost of age. Nobody can stop us. I shall be as firm as Philip was——"

"Oh, Tamsin! Tamsin! Tamsin!" cried the woman. "You don't know what you do say. You be bound to wed wi' Isaac. Poor chile! You must—you must. 'Tis a matter o' life or death, maybe——"

Thomasine sprang to her feet.

"What is it you are saying, mother? What

do you mean?"

"Oh! What have I said?" moaned Jane Scutt. But very quickly she recovered herself and dropping her voice went on speaking as one coaxes a child. "Take your mother's word for it, Tamsin, my own poor maid. Seek no further, Tamsin. I told 'ee by now. Ask never a word, but do—an' th' Almighty'll bless 'ee for it. Just put aside the young man o' Netherton-town. He's none o' your own sort. He'll change. Take the young Isaac. These fine young men—they be one thing in love an' another in marriage. But what Isaac is, he'll bide. He's rough maybe to your thinking—but he's one like ourselves. Ah! We've a-bred 'ee up too fine, Tamsin. Too fine—to our own sorrow."

"To your own sorrow, mother?" repeated

Thomasine, now roused into anger. "What sorrow? Why should there be sorrow because I have promised to marry one of my own choice? Life or death! What sense to such wild talk—unless you see that it would break my heart. And it would to marry Isaac Cledworth. I should die—I should die of very shame."

"Sit down again, Tamsin. Sit down an' speak never a word. There's not a minute to spare, for your father may be back. You shall hear the truth. You shall know all—every word o' it. And

then you shall judge."

Thomasine sat down without reply, but away from the fire in the furthest corner of the old high-backed settle.

"Tamsin, last night, after you had a-went into Netherton-town, there came up a sea-vog, as your father had a-thought would. Come closer, maid, so as I needn't to speak out so loud. Here—come just to here."

Jane Scutt glanced around, as if fearing that eavesdroppers might be present even in "the house," and pointed to the vacant place on the stone seat by her side.

Thomasine silently rose, crossed the kitchen and obeyed.

Jane's brown hand grasped Tamsin's arm, and she went on—never daring to look her daughter in the face, but staring beyond her into space, as she pictured in every detail the tale she had to tell. "'Twas a vog so black as pitch for hours—but in the early morning it lifted into starlight. Your father took his supper. Then he an' the old dog went out 'pon the common, Tamsin. You can't see the meaning o' my words. He chanced very quick to fall in wi' three sheep, an' the old dog brought 'em on. Your father turned to an' killed and skinned 'em, and went off again. I had made ready a great fire here all to a red glow—but I had no chance to burn the skins. I had 'em—two over my right arm, an' the t'other a-dragging on by my left han' like—an' they catched me, Tamsin. They came out from lying in wait by the cow-stall, an' they catched your mother, your own mother, Tamsin, an' they——"

"Who, mother? Who?"

"The Cledworths. The old Isaac, an' he the tithing-man an' all—an' the young Isaac, his son. They catched me like this by the both wristes. In their hands I was no stronger 'an a child. Like this—like this. But my heart sunk within me, Tamsin. I was weak as water. I could but come. An' they dragged me here, in front o' the great fire, an' into the light—an'—an' they spread out the three skins—there—there 'pon the flagstones, an' there as so happed was their own mark, the C wi' the skiver down through, 'pon all the three o' the fleeces——''

Thomasine understood.

The whole truth came before her mind with the

clearness of a revelation. She had listened to too many fireside tales of stealing sheep from the moor to mistake the significance of a single word. The true meaning of that scarcely credible story of her delicate health-invented only to be rid of herthe mystery of those unexpected visits to Nethertontown whenever the mist hung over the moor, the rapid growth of her father's wealth and the purchase of Hatchbarrow, the hidden significance of all these wonders became suddenly discovered. In the mirk of a thick sea-fog, a man bred on the moor and a silent dog could bring in sheep with little fear of detection. At ten paces he was not to be seen. At an arm's length he was scarcely to be recognized. And no living soul can swear to mutton. That was one of the commonest of fireside sayings. There was no danger if the thief could only get rid of the skin. No other evidence had ever brought a man to the gallows except the skin-the mark on the skin.

This unlooked-for disclosure was most terribly complete.

Thomasine could only gasp:

"You, mother! Father and you!"

In all Jane's sighings over her hidden iniquities, in all her fears of ill to come, the shame of standing discovered and guilty in the eyes of Tamsin had haunted her beyond all dangers and penalties of the law. In Tamsin's lament was no reproach, only surprise and heartbroken sorrow.

In spite of the danger hanging over them, the mother's first instinct was to excuse herself.

"We be sinners, God knows. Wicked sinners! But we did it all for you, child. There was no other thought, an' many a time we've a-said it. Our Tamsin shall be well off. Our Tamsin shall have no need to work, we said in our pride. For we have a-worked, Tamsin, your father an' I. We never stole to spare ourselves. We never lived high, we never lay soft. We scarce sat down from morn to night. All our hopes were to make 'ee a lady. Ever since you came to us, the only one, an' so late. For you were always from the first, Tamsin, so nice in your ways. Why, when you were but a toddlerno more 'an knee-high-if should chance but a smut to fall 'pon your little bare arm-why, you'd cry, Tamsin—you'd cry till I did jus' touch o' it like wi' the tip o' my tongue and rub it off wi' my apern. You was nothing for this hard work, Tamsin, my dear, an' we saw it. How you comed to us, rough as we be. I never couldn' think. Yes. We saw it, Tamsin—we saw it—an' though we prospered we sinned an' we put 'ee to school an' all. But I ha'n't a-told 'ee everything now. There's more an' may be worse to come-

Jane Scutt stopped.

Emotion had broken the thread of her narrative, and she needs must press her hands upon her lined forehead to collect her thoughts.

Thomasine did not speak. Everything was clear

before her mind—the love—the oft-repeated crime—and the present peril. She sprang up from the settle. Trembling between pity, fear and love, but in utter helplessness, she seated herself by her mother's side and clung to her arm. The woman drew her closer, pressed her to her bosom, and encouraged, went on more eagerly than before—her words coming faster with each sentence:

"Your father picked up two suckers. He brought 'em home. How should he know? He was off afore the Cledworths took me. But the Cledworths hadn' a-went. They had not gone, Tamsin-oh, maid! He'll be hanged for the ponies, for certain sure. Old Isaac is the tithingman. He's the constable. He took 'em away in the name o' the law. To-day he'll find the little mares on the common—an' the mares'll own 'em. Tamsin. 'Tis their mother's nature, Tamsin. They can't help theirselves, Tamsin. They can't forget so soon. They'll wicker. They'll run an' own 'em, Tamsin. They'll gie suck. Why! If 'tis only to ease theirselves-gie suck they must. An' that'll be proof-proof so clear as eye-witness a'most. They'll hang your father—they little mares. An' your father do know it. He tried to face it out that the suckers were our own an' the sheep a mistake. But after constable had a-went, your father came in an' zot down there-there where you got up from. He had never a word for hisself then-nor I one to help un wi'. He zot so silent as a dead man."

Jane Scutt's voice had sunk lower and lower, until it was scarcely to be heard. Her eyes were fixed on the vacant corner of the settle as if John were still there. Then, perhaps unconscious of what she was doing, she muttered, "Let be a minute, Tamsin," and rose and lifted the kettle, long ago boiling to waste, to one side out of the flame.

She sat down on the opposite seat of the hearth

away from Tamsin and continued.

Every movement, every gesture, every word spoken in that part of the story yet to come had graven itself so deep upon her brain that presently it was no longer a tale she was telling. She spoke only the bare dialogue, even imitating the voices. Ignorant though she was, Jane's unstudied art made it all terribly clear.

"Oh! they Cledworths! The cunning o' they Cledworths! It might be a half hour, or a little better—ay—more, an' then they comed back. They never knocked to door. They walked straight in—the constable in front an' the young Isaac at his heels. Your father thought they had a-comed to take un. You do know your father, Tamsin. Ah! His way! He stood up there—over there, so stern—wi' his back to the wall. But the old Isaac only said, 'Sit down, neighbour, an' exchange a word or two.' I seed your father's countenance light up. He do know they Cledworths. He thought they Cledworths 'ud take money. The old man he did all the talking an' the young Isaac stood by.

"' A tithing-man is chose to look after the law.

"' But not to go beyond it,' put in your father.
"' That's true, neighbour. But the parish would hold wi' me where the case do look so black. Now. a jury, I wouldn't swear. Maybe the mark nowso much like your own. An' such a dark night, too, and you, maybe, short o' mutton. An', to be sure, we may never prove the suckers—we can but try. An' none better pleased 'an myself an' Isaac to bring 'em back to 'ee. But we comed back now wi' another intention.'

"' There's fools 'ull believe anything. There's no case. Still I'd rather do more than a little not to have such a thing said. We can make it right——'

"' Hush, neighbour, if you should offer to buy a tithingman 't'ud look so terrible bad in the box. No. 'Tis well known our Isaac is wild in love wi' your Tamsin. There's some do say he must be witched. Now we be come to make a offer for your Tamsin.'

"' There's no chance o' it. I don't offer, but I'd

pay money if asked---'

"' Not too fast, neighbour." " 'She shall choose for herself.'

"' Exactly. We do but offer. Tamsin, we do know, is in to Netherton-town. Fetch her home to-morrow, neighbour. Lay our offer before her quick as you can. To-morrow may be fog. Like enough we shan't be ready till next day. Say late in afternoon. We'll look round, if all is right, for the answer.'

"' 'Tis no good. Do your worst.'

"' Maybe there's no worst, neighbour. Look round we must, I know. I said for an answer if all is right. Mark me, no Cledworth, for love or money, 'ud wed wi' the maid of a convick.'

"' 'Tis no good to come on such errand.'

"'But come we must. If we don't have to take 'ee, we can't be so rude as to leave 'ee in doubt. No maid, neighbour, do know her mind till she's asked. I do believe, Tamsin 'ull take un. We be neighbours. Just think how the land do lie. An' if Tamsin do gie the word young Isaac can go thereright an' put in the banns for first time o' asking Sunday next. There can be no need to wait. To be sure, you'd settle Hatchbarrow 'pon your only child—keeping a life interest, of course. So neighbours, we'll say good-night.'

"An' wi' that they walked out. But oh! they Cledworths! The cunning o' they Cledworths! An' the old man so soft as new milk, yet so hard as a seapebble. We talked the night through, Tamsin, my maid, your father an' I. There's no chance wi' 'em. They be all envy an' covetousness. Though the young Isaac do love 'ee wonderful. He do that. An' a fine young man, too, that half the world could be proud o'. He is that. An', oh Tamsin! There's no light, nor way nor hope. Love or no love—promise or no promise—faith or no faith—Master Philip could never wed wi' the maid of a man that was hanged."

CHAPTER II

THE DECISION

THERE was nothing more to be told.

Thomasine and her mother remained sitting by the hearth weeping in silence. They had found comradeship in their adversity and in their fear. Once Jane raised her head and whispered "Hark!" It was nothing. The wind was rising, and a gust had rumbled in the head of the chimney. It drove a cloud of smoke out into the room. Although they did not mention his name, they were both listening intently for the return of John. They were both in fear of his coming. Rough and masterful even in his goodhumour, with Thomasine his downright ways had passed for plain blunt honesty. To her he had always been kind. From childhood she had never feared him. But the father of the past was gone. Now she was afraid. His foot crossing the threshold —then the next step towards humiliation and misery.

"Hearken again!"

They both listened. This time the sound of wheels was unmistakable. But to-day no shout came from the barton. The silence had its signifi-

cance. There were no purchases from Netherton to be fetched into the house. Never since she was big enough had Tamsin failed to run out to meet her father on his return from town. Now she sprang up to flee from him. By the door she stopped.

"Ay. Run away, Tamsin, my dear. 'Tis no

good to wait. I'll talk to your father myself."

Then Thomasine crept away upstairs, took refuge in her room and locked the door. She was suffocating—choking. There was no air—no air in the room. She opened the window and threw herself upon the bed.

All that was solid, certain, firm and abiding in this life had suddenly crumbled from beneath her feet. If the integrity of her father were an illusion there could be nothing real, nothing on earth to rest upon. Everything was false. They themselves, all of them, were false. Hatchbarrow was not theirs. She was no longer Philip's, and Philip could never be hers.

Again and again, without rest, all the circumstances went chasing each other through her brain. Like a bird encaged, she turned every way only to beat once more against the same bars. She was in a labyrinth where every path not closed led back to the same place.

To tell Philip was to make known her father's shame. If she told nothing, on Sunday the banns might be read in church to the whole neighbourhood. Then what could he think of her in the face

of all her promises? How was he to explain her to his friends?

She could never consent.

With the thought of refusal she remembered the young Isaac's threats. She could find no hope that the Cledworths would be merciful. Their plot had been too carefully prepared. The constable might be tempted with money, but the fierce love of the young Isaac was not to be bought off. They had thought of everything, even to the settlement of Hatchbarrow! Oh! let them have Hatchbarrow. All delight in Hatchbarrow was gone for ever, since that was how it was got. Let them have Hatchbarrow if only she might go free—free and somewhere far away, where not even a whisper could carry the story of her shame.

And presently, as if unaware of her distress, the little everyday occurrences of house and farm began to move around her as if nothing had happened.

She heard her father go out of the house, come in and go again. Very soon came the passing of the cows and the scent of their milky udders. She heard the taking of the pails from the garden wall, and then the singing of the milk against the staves. For the daily business will go forward whatever may befall. John and Jane, after a short talk, had drifted into the current of everyday life. And every little sound they made, in its commonplace familiarity became cruel and inexorable.

It seemed to Thomasine that there was no way

and no hope. This thing must go forward like everything else upon this earth moving irresistibly towards some unseen end.

"Oh God! Let me die! Let me die quickly! Oh God!"

The loathsome horror of marriage with Isaac Cledworth arose before her in all its hideous details—to touch him—to be wife to him—

"Oh! Let me die! Let me die!"

All other fear was swallowed up in the presence of this overwhelming terror. Thomasine burned with shame. A chill, icy and damp, seized upon her and froze her blood. She trembled like an ague. Thomasine came near to meeting with the fulfilment of her prayer. From the very centre of her bewilderment, as it were a grave face in the midst of a tumultuous crowd, came the thought that she held it in her power to die if she would. She could consent—or let her father carry her consent. But they could never make her marry. Let them call the banns. Let them fix the wedding. Let them arrange as they might think fit. She would hide, lock herself up, elude Isaac, as she had always done, until the time drew near. Her father would be safe by then. They could do nothing-prove nothing-after these weeks had elapsed. Then—her father safe but Philip lost—at night she could steal up to the Beacon Head, pass through the dark wood and throw herself from the cliff. The thought quieted her. She could breathe again.

Towards twilight her mother came, tried the door and knocked.

"Open," said Jane, "I want a word wi' 'ee, chile."

"No. Not yet, mother. Leave me alone."

"But you must have a bit to eat."

"No, mother. I do not want anything."

"Not to come down, Tamsin, my dear. I don't say that. Open. I've a-brought it to 'ee."

"No. Nothing. Go away and leave me,

mother."

"I'll put it down at your door, Tamsin."

It was no good. Jane creaked down the stairs defeated.

Presently Thomasine became conscious of a distant hum, a constant murmur that rose and fell but never ceased. like the distant voice of the river in flood when heard from the moor. Her ear had never before caught a sound from the kitchen, except when her mother opened the door and raised her voice to call. But she knew that they were talking -talking always about her. After dark her mother came and knocked again. But Thomasine made no reply. And all through the still night the moan of their talking and planning went on. They might arrange what they would. Thomasine would do nothing. She could never see Philip again. She could not lie to him. She could not tell him that her father was a thief. They might plan and arrange, but they must carry out their plans for themselves.

Thomasine determined to remain locked in her room. The Cledworths might come and go. Her father must deal with them as best he could and afterwards they could tell her what had been done. Before the night was through, Thomasine had found the acquiescence that comes of despair.

Daybreak came at last with happy sounds of

awakening life.

The turkeys flew down from their roost in the trees ready to wander away by the lane. The geese gobbled their intentions concerning some distant stubble. Earlier than usual—before it was fully light—she heard her father go away. Her mother stole upstairs once more, laid her ear against the panel of the door, and, hearing nothing, crept noiselessly away. At last from sheer exhaustion Thomasine fell asleep.

Towards noon she awoke with a start. The bright sunlight was streaming in through the window, for the day, as it came from heaven, was as glorious as yesterday, when she walked homeward across the moor. But at the door her mother was knocking, this time with a determination not

to be refused.

"Open, Tamsin. Your father an' I have a-talked. I do want a word wi' ee, my dear."

"Leave me alone, mother. Leave me alone."

"No, Tamsin. Open, chile. Verily an' truly we have a-found out the way."

Tamsin got up and turned the key.

"I've a-brought on a few broths in my hand," said Jane.

That was her name for a basin of bread and milk.

And she stood by and made Tamsin eat.

"Didn't you say, Tamsin, that Master Philip is to come to-day evening?"

"Yes, mother."

"You must go out an' stop un from the house. Your father do say he can't come here."

"I shall never see him again, mother."

"But you must. He'd come. He'd fall in wi' they Cledworths. Now listen, Tamsin, for we've a-thought it all out clear. You must say to Master Philip that your father won't hear a word of it. Say, Tamsin, if he should once give Master Philip a 'No' right out, he is stubborn as a bull. Say you must wait. Say you can manage, chile, if you do but wait an' catch the moment like. Then Master Philip will go away an' no harm done 'atween 'ee.'

"Mother, if everything could be hushed up, I

know it. I can never marry Philip now."

"'Tis wild talk, Tamsin. That'll pass."

"No, mother. No. No-"

"But listen to me a minute, chile." Jane's voice sank into a whisper so full of guile. "They Cledworths have a-set a trap. Why not we? First, your father 'ull try all he can to buy the constable. Mind, he can't pay down, there right. That can't be expected. An' they Cledworths can never move once they do let the time pass."

Jane paused, but Tamsin spoke not a word.

"If that should be, an' you do act prudent like, an' Master Philip none the wiser, why, in a week you can win your father round to consent, an' all be well. Can't you see that, Tamsin?"

But Thomasine gave no comfort.

"An' if not that, your father'll gain time. You to promise the young Isaac if needs be, but not allowing the banns. 'Tis all out o' reason about they banns. La! The time o' danger past, you can break it off like, to be sure; many a maid do an' thought none the worse. For they Cledworths 'ud take money then—that or nothing—you bet a guinea. An' if they have a-talked, your father can deny it outright."

Thomasine only sighed and wept.

"But if the banns must be, Tamsin, trust to your mother. Your mother 'ull send 'ee away out of all finding. We'll gie out as afore that you do always ail o' the cold winter here. There'll be no surprise. We'll swear the young Isaac took a word wrong an' put in the banns unpromised. It 'ud fit to how you did treat un, Tamsin. Lauk! Against your father's words, there's none would believe the Cledworths. Not Master Philip. No fear. An' then your father would gie consent. Can't you see it, Tamsin?"

Thomasine could see it. Her eyes were opened

Thomasine could see it. Her eyes were opened to the crafty world around her, in which she had grown up in innocence without suspicion of anybody. And Jane stood awaiting her approval.

"Say no more of Philip, mother. Never mention his name to me again," cried she, and turned away and hid her face.

Jane did not understand.

"Do as your father do wish, I do beg o' 'ee, Tamsin," she implored. "You be everything to we, my dear. You have a-been—you be—an' you shall be. Can 'ee think what your father said in the night, chile? I tell 'ee what your father said. He stood out there in the kitchen, an' he pointed his finger 'pon the floor, an' he said, 'Afore God! If Master Philip did stand there, an' swear he'd wed her come what may, I'd dare 'em to their worst, if I was to be hanged for it.' An' he would, Tamsin. He would."

The words went to Thomasine's heart. In spite of all she knew them true.

"It shall be as you wish, mother. I will go and tell Philip not to come."

CHAPTER III

THOMASINE TELLS

"Leave me to myself," pleaded Thomasine. "I shall do quicker alone."

For Jane had stayed to help her get ready, and Jane was full of fears and haste. Her fingers trembled so that she not only did but undid. Thomasine noted the frequent glances which her mother cast from the window, as if expecting at any moment to see Philip ride into the barton. And all the while Jane continued to counsel prudence, to explain and repeat and assure that all would come right in the end, if Tamsin would only act a little bit careful and wise like.

This constant reiteration of the same pitiable arguments wearied Thomasine. She must tell Philip that her father withheld consent, but how could she tell him or hide from him she was never to marry him. She felt herself entangled in the meshes of the universal prevarication and untruth.

"Yes. Leave me to myself," she repeated in utter weariness.

Conscious of her inability to be of use, Jane wept and withdrew.

Left alone, Thomasine set herself, as far as possible, to remove the traces of her sleeplessness and of her tears. Although the sun was shining, a biting wind swept through the sheltering trees, and dead leaves went drifting across the barton and before the house. Winter was in the air. A chill clung around her heart. Thomasine shivered. From a drawer she took the long cloak of dark green freize, which had been put away ever since the spring, and wrapt it around her. She drew the hood over her head. Thus disguised, she hurried downstairs and started upon her way.

As she went through the garden there came a

step in the barton.

She stopped—her heart beating in fear lest it

might be Philip.

Her father, coming in from the fields, had already passed between the stacks and through the gate into the yard before he caught sight of her. He believed himself unobserved. Thomasine was just in time to see him step hurriedly aside and hide himself behind one of the projecting buttresses of the old barn.

The terrors of her mother had not brought before her mind the humiliation of the Scutts more forcibly than did this little touch of consciencestricken cowardice. Tears rushed into her eyes. With head averted, Thomasine strode across the barton to the lane leading to the moor.

Often forced to stop to regain breath, she toiled

up the stony rift where once she had gone so gaily, and reached the Beacon Head. She mounted the cairn, from the top of which she could see for miles, but no horseman could her eyes discover upon the broad moor. The wind came sweeping across the sea, everywhere breaking its surface into short, fretful waves. At that height it was blusterous, unceasing and very cold.

Since Philip was not yet in sight Thomasine must have some time to wait. Nor had she the heart to-day to watch from the crest of the beacon and wave a welcome to Philip from afar. She drew her cloak more closely around her, and crouched down under the shelter of the boulder which had formerly served them for a seat. The wind rushed whistling by. The swish and moan of waves, breaking and receding amongst the rocks below the cliffs, alternated with sad monotony. They seemed to call to her and promise a sure way out of a life wherein what appeared most certain proved illusion and no hope was to be trusted.

Thus Thomasine waited long, until at last, what with the noise of the wind and the hood deafening her ears, Philip came unheard and found her behind the stone. His first thought was that she

was playing hide and seek with him.

His voice startled her.

"I have found you then. I thought I was here first. It would have served you right, you little deceiver, if I had overlooked you and

ridden away down to Hatchbarrow in search of

you."

He came in the best of spirits, glowing with love, full of news—the Philip of the day before yesterday, but further elated with his gallop across the moor, for lawyer Marshall's horse was reeking with sweat. In his light-hearted way he began at once to carry on the story where it was broken off at Nethertontown.

"And what do you think? Such news! Old Marshall, giddy old widower, is going to marry my mother. Their elderly hearts are softened towards all lovers by the influence of Love. Therein lies the explanation of the mystery. My mother is more than anxious for me to have Court. So is he. He tells her it will be the making of me to get me settled. But, Thomasine, dear, I have come as soon as I could. Poor child, to be waiting in the wind. How wise to wrap yourself up. If you had been standing by the beacon, upon my word, I could scarcely have recognized you—"

He had dismounted and taken her in his arms.

He pressed her to his heart.

Thomasine could neither resist nor speak. Her misery disclosed itself in a great sob.

"But what is the matter, Thomasine dear? Poor child, to wait so long. But you might have been sure, dearest, that I would not delay one moment. If my case seems to lack evidence, look at the horse. Look at him. The dear old amorous

old Marshall would drop down and die of a fit if he could see."

The girl could not make a direct reply.

"There is a linhay in the corner by the gate below. The wind is cold. The horse will be in shelter there. I must not stay long."

"Not stay long, Thomasine? My own love! Why are you talking like this? Not stay long!

I am coming home with you, am I not?"

"Don't kiss me, Philip! Don't. I have come

to break it off," she sobbed.

"Break it off! What has happened? Everything has changed for the best, Thomasine. I have no longer to think of my mother. She wishes us to marry at once—what do you mean? Break it off!"

He pressed her head against his breast and bent over her, kissing and comforting her as one does a frightened child.

"Don't, Philip," she begged of him. "It makes

it so hard."

"What is it, little one," he whispered.

She could not find words to tell him then. For answer she only drew him toward the path. They went down the rocky descent, he leading her and supporting her. Once she almost fell. But he caught her. His arm around her waist, he half carried her over the stones, with the panting, weary-legged horse dragging on the rein and stumbling behind. Thus they got to the bottom of

the hill. Whilst he stabled the horse in the shed, she sat down on a heap of dried bracken, that had been cut that autumn on the moor and brought down to serve as bedding for cattle.

She had come meaning to tell him the fable that her father refused consent. Now that the moment was come, in the unselfish purity of their love she recovered her simplicity of soul. She must tell all. Her native sincerity, which, throughout the years of her simple girlhood, had grown and matured unhurt by the presence of a single weed of suspicion, reasserted itself. One thing only remained true and real. She still trusted to Philip's love. It compelled her. She could neither deceive him nor withhold one syllable of the truth.

"Don't touch me, Philip. Don't—don't say you love me. Sit down. I have something very terrible—something beyond all that you can believe—

to tell you."

She hid her face in her hands and yielded to a paroxysm of tears. Philip stood silent and motionless in the presence of an emotion so profound. Once Thomasine attempted to speak, but her tongue faltered. The words choked her and failed. At last she controlled herself, and her voice, although very low, was steady and calm.

"When I promised to marry you, Philip, I thought—I thought that the Scutts were as good as anybody—better—better than many, seeing that my father had been so successful and made a way

for himself. Now, at last, I know the truth. Now I know how Hatchbarrow was got—in part, at least. We are sheepstealers. We are horse-thieves. We—the Scutts—that I boasted were so honest. I come of no stock to marry a good man. If I could have hidden it from you, I should always know it myself. If it could be hushed up now, after years it might come out to your shame."

"John Scutt a sheepstealer! Nonsense, Thomasine. A thief is never an industrious man. Who said so? This is a place full of idle tales. How do

you know this?"

"The two Cledworths lay in wait and caught them in the act."

"When?"

"In the sea-fog the night before last."

In misery and shame her eyes were turned away from him. She did not see it, but the face of Philip became very grave. Inconceivable as the statement had been, it was no longer possible to disbelieve.

Suddenly alive to the danger of John Scutt, he asked quickly:

"Has the constable taken action?"

"He is coming to-night, he and Isaac—presently. The sheep were theirs. There were ponies, too. The old man is pretending to identify the ponies. And, Philip! He will only keep silence if I will marry Isaac. Oh! What can I do? If I do not promise to marry him at once, they will take father

to-night. If I promise, the constable will let it pass."

"The scoundrels!"

For a while Philip was silent.

"Did your father agree?"

The old spirit of loyalty still lingered in Thomasine's heart. She tried to shield her father—to save him, as far as possible, in the estimation of Philip.

"No. He did not agree," she replied eagerly. "He did not know of our love. He left it to me. They are coming to-night for the answer. I was told to come and meet you, but to keep you from the house. I was to tell you that father will not consent to our engagement, and so gain time. Then father will try to buy them off. If so, we were to be engaged, and you none the wiser. But I cannot do it, Philip. I cannot marry you to deceive you when you love me so much. And they will not be bought for money. They say Hatchbarrow shall be given to me. They will not be bought for any sum. I know they will not. Oh! What can I do?"

"Tell me everything-just as it happened."

He spoke calmly, something like a lawyer endeavouring to extract the last word from a reluctant client. His self-possession strengthened her confidence. Thomasine told the whole story, slowly, clearly, in all its squalid details—just as her mother had told it to her.

"Were you going to promise Cledworth, Thomasine?"

"What could I do?"

"To marry him?"

"Oh, no. I would never have married him. No," she shuddered.

"The scoundrels!" cried he again.

He paused a moment and then continued:

"I have no doubt you may completely set your mind at rest, Thomasine, so far as the Cledworths are concerned. Now listen. You will have to do exactly what I tell you. So listen very attentively. You may have to promise, but you can never be in any real danger whatever. At what time are they coming?

"After work is done. Quite late in the afternoon, or at least in time to act without letting

another night pass."

"Where are your father and mother now?"

"They will very soon be out milking."

"The talk will be in the kitchen?"

"Yes. In the kitchen."

"Well, go home, Thomasine dear. Keep quietly out of the way, so that you need not speak to your people. At any rate, tell them nothing about me, or say I saw the wisdom of not seeing your father to-day. Everything is quite safe. Have no fear. Be present at the interview. Refuse as long as you can. Let your father offer money. If they are tempted to take it, well and good. There is an end

to the matter. If not, go on refusing. Make them bargain. Gain all the time you can. Make them threaten. Constable has no time to waste, for he has delayed the information quite long enough already. Hold out until he comes to a dangerous point. Then give way. Promise as if you meant it. But have no fear. The Cledworths will soon find that they have a little matter of their own to settle. You'll never hear more of the promise after to-night. The Cledworths will be off their bargain almost as soon as they have made it. Your father will hear no more about it. But if they will take money, leave them alone. If not-well, you will see. Before they have time to rejoice, there will be a surprise for them. Believe me, this is so certain that I could take a grim delight in their confusion, if you were not so unhappy, Thomasine dear."

He spoke so confidently, almost cheerfully, that

Thomasine gained courage.

"We must leave all the rest for the present, Thomasine. Have we not said a hundred times that nothing can ever change our love. I shall see you again very soon, dearest—perhaps late to-night, after the Cledworths have gone. So good-bye. A very short good-bye. As you sometimes say, Thomasine—au revoir. You had better go alone. We will not be seen together. Have no fear. I have not spent years grubbing in the office of old Marshall for nothing. Truly I could laugh at the predicament of the Cledworths, if you were not so sad."

Philip respected her wish. They parted without endearment or caress and without a single word of love-making.

Philip hurried back into the shed and remained

out of sight until Thomasine was gone.

Thomasine, comforted with his promises of help and assurances of safety, found courage and very quickly disappeared in the lane between the high beech hedgerows.

CHAPTER IV

THE SURPRISE

THE kitchen at Hatchbarrow presented no sombre aspect whilst awaiting the arrival of the old Isaac Cledworth and his son. Whatever the fears of the Scutts, they had determined to put a good face on the matter and brave it out as long as they could. Candles had been lighted. A good fire of logs blazed on the dogs. The kettle was boiling merrily, and a spirit decanter, with glasses, sugar and spoons had been set out on the table as if in anticipation of jollity and to assure a hearty welcome to the arriving guests.

But each one, after a different fashion, betrayed an agitation which it was hopeless entirely to sup-

press.

Jane had taken her seat in one corner of the settle, her hands under her apron, her head bent, her eyes fixed upon her lap.

But her hands twitched, her head shook and her

eyes shed tears.

John was in his armchair by the side of the hearth. The face of John Scutt was stern and rigid, and his jaw more square than ever. Scarcely to be noticed, Thomasine had taken a seat between the dresser and the clock, far from the fire, in the gloom, where the dark oaken beams and furniture drank up the dim candle-light.

So they waited and listened in silence.

The Cledworths were long in coming. Their want of eagerness seemed to forebode the worst.

The delay pressed heavily upon Jane, and she sighed and sighed. She was for ever raising false alarms. "Here they be. Here they be," when there was nothing.

Such weakness angered John.

"If you do mean to show fear, you had better get out o' the way. Sit up, can't 'ee?" he growled angrily.

Jane sighed deeper than ever, swallowed her fears as best she could and made distressing efforts to sit still.

At last the approach of visitors was undeniable. The clatter of feet on the stones—the last muttered conference by the mouth of the porch—the scraping and rubbing of boots at the door—then the latch lifted.

John Scutt rose hastily, went to the door, and, with a welcome less boisterous than usual, but a welcome all the same, invited the Cledworths to come in.

The little tithingman was in the familiar cord breeches with the flat buttons at the knee, but the young Isaac had changed his working garments for his Sunday clothes, and, with a white dahlia as big as a tea-saucer in his buttonhole, assumed the jaunty self-satisfaction of a village bridegroom. They entered with the innocent air of neighbours looking in of an evening to smoke a pipe.

"Good evening, Jane."

The face of the constable was unusually merry and bright as he shook hands with Jane with the warmth of an old friend.

"How be, Tamsin?"

The countenance of the young Isaac wore a more than ever self-satisfied grin as, with this greeting, he held out his hand to Tamsin, who neither looked at him nor spoke.

At this refusal to answer him his lips drew apart into a smile half cruel, half tolerant. He enjoyed that greatest luxury of a mean spirit—a knowledge of the power to enforce his will and inflict pain upon the weak. In her pale, tearful face he foresaw the triumph of his threats, and though he believed he loved her—and did, as best he might—the sight of her tears filled him with inward joy.

"Make room for Isaac, Jane. Take the settle,

neighbour," said John Scutt.

Gladly enough Jane gave place, and retired out of the way to the chimney-corner. The Cledworths sat down side by side on the settle, full in the firelight and opposite to John Scutt.

The constable did the talking and began at once. If the young Isaac had the muscles, the little

tithingman had the wit. But he talked about everything except the business in hand. No man of sense will ever dive head-first into delicate negotiations. It is better to creep in and make no splash. A moorland farmer begins by talking about turf-cutting or stag-hunting, or the addition of a twin to some neighbour's family, when he hopes to bring about the purchase of some promising young bullock.

"Wool is dropped again," said the old Isaac,

thoughtfully looking at the ceiling.

"So they do tell me," replied John Scutt, as usual rubbing his square chin.

"You got out o' yours, neighbour, just after shearing, so I do believe."

" I did."

"But you be always in the right, neighbour,

either by luck or judgment."

To which congratulation John Scutt replied only with the snort which often dismissed unwelcome reference to his wealth.

"Or maybe both," added the old Isaac with a

very bland smile.

At which compliment John Scutt shook his head with impatience, as if considering it not

worthy of a reply.

"You be thoughtful, neighbour," laughed the constable after a pause. "Thoughtful enough to put out the bottle, but too full o' thought to ask us to drink."

Without a word John Scutt rose and went to

the table to mix the grogs.

"Not a drop," said Cledworth, raising both his hands. "'Twas but a joke. 'Tis early yet. Besides, there 'ull no doubt be a better reason afore the night is much older."

He turned merrily round to Thomasine.

"So you be back again, Tamsin. True, the misk did not last long, so you had no need to think o' your health. Besides, a fine young man came along to look for 'ee, eh, Tamsin? To be sure, any maid 'ud soon be home then. No doubt your folk have a-gied 'ee Isaac's message, an' here he is, so fine as a bird o' Paradise in the mating season, to fetch the answer."

Then John Scutt spoke out in his old blunt manner.

"What I want to know is this-have you brought

back my ponies?"

"Keep to one thing at a time, neighbour. Take the pleasant first. Always through life do that. A trouble feared may never come in the end. How many times, haymaking or harvest now, do a man fear rain an' the clouds blow over after all?"

"Then I must believe from your own words that you've a-found out your error. No Cledworth for love or money could wed the maid o' a thief. Then act the man—own yourself wrong."

The old Isaac perceived the difficulty and pre-

tended to reflect.

"Did I say so much as that? How could any man know? Truly now, come to think o' it, I must ha' said 'convicted thief.'"

He glanced round and winked at young Isaac. But John Scutt caught sight of the wink, and it hardened within him his old spirit of resistance and stubbornness.

"Our Tamsin is not ready wi' a 'Yes' or a 'No,' Isaac Cledworth," said he roughly. "She is not the sort to marry in haste. An' we are not the sort to bundle her into church like chucking a sheep into a sheepwash. That must be left."

"Very well, then. Why talk more?" said old

Isaac calmly, and rose from his seat.

John Scutt, taking no notice, went on doggedly talking.

"As to the two sheep, they were yours, as the marks did prove. That was my mistake. I own to that. Forty shillings a-piece is the outside value o'——"

"But the ponies, neighbour? So we do come to

the ponies after all."

"—the outside value, I say, of a far better sheep. As to the ponies—as you know by this time—they be mine. I had a-picked 'em up for fair an' kept 'em shut away in a linhay. I was fetching 'em in for the morning——"

"Why talk an' explain so much about it, John Scutt? There's no need. What I do know, I do

know. An' for that matter, so do you, too."

"I do know that--"

"None can know better 'an you, John Scutt. So why so much talk an' so many questions?"

His manner had become threatening, but he turned to Thomasine and dropped once more into jocularity.

"I shall talk to none but Tamsin. I've a-got a partic'lar fancy for Tamsin-always had. I shall tell Tamsin some o' the wonders o' the world. Tamsin, my dearie, your father is so rich that your mother do burn a skin worth full a crown whenever he do kill a sheep at midnight. Your father is so lucky, Tamsin, that a strange mare 'ull mother every one o' his ponies. All the parish is full o' your father's luck, Tamsin. Have a-been for years. 'Tis said every one o' his mares do litter just like any old sow. For every mare he do own, so they do say, he can sell ten suckers of a season. Oh! They do talk, I 'sure 'ee-about he, an' you an' the sea-fog. You'd be well off married to a honest man. Now. I've a-brought no charge. Say the word, my maid."

"No-no-no," sobbed Thomasine.

"We be doing well, Isaac. Many 'Noes' is the beginning o' 'Yes.' All good maidens be bound to blurt out a few 'Noes' at the outset."

"To save talk, ask any price you like for the sheep——" began John Scutt, with an impatient wave of his hand, as if he could stand no more of it.

"Any price—you heard that, Isaac," cried the constable.

But he took no notice whatever of John Scutt, and continued to talk to Thomasine.

"I do want Tamsin to understand. One o' we two must go a errand afore folk be a-bed. We've a-changed our coats for the purpose. There's no time to lose. Either Isaac do ride up to parsonage to put in the banns—or I myself do ride to the justice to take out the warrant. Either one o' us should be back in a hour. T'other could bide to keep 'ee all company. If your father should run meanwhile, might be held to prove his guilt. Now then, Tamsin! What do 'ee say? Say the word, maid."

"No-no-" repeated the girl.

"Very well, then. Here's off."

In a very determined manner the old Isaac took two steps towards the door. Then he stopped.

"I be off, Tamsin. Gwaine. Say the word, Tamsin. Gwaine—gwaine—gwaine—"

With each word he raised his voice and took a further step towards the door. With his hand almost on the latch, he paused again. Like an auctioneer, who delays the falling of the hammer, he argued very quietly, with convincing pauses and self-restraint.

"You do know an' fully understand no doubt the possible consequences, Tamsin, of your decision. The jury might believe your father's tale—but if by chance—not—the worst is the gallows and the best is overseas for life."

Suddenly he lifted his voice again.

"Gwaine—gwaine—"

One more step and once more he softened, almost coaxed.

"Now let young Isaac ride up to the passon's an' all settled. Where could 'ee ever find a healthier, vittier young man? An' there'll be none—no, not one in the whole county—that will so much as cast eyes on 'ee after next assize."

Tamsin felt her courage sink. A terrible misgiving seized hold of her. She feared that in telling Philip she had not spoken about the banns. If she let young Isaac go, the banns would be in before Philip could act.

"Gwaine—gwaine—very well then, Isaac. All over. John Scutt offered any price. You as a witness. You stay an' watch John Scutt. Here's off."

"Promise! For God's sake! Promise, Tamsin, my child. Save us, Tamsin. Save your father—an' your mother what bore 'ee. Save us—same as we both said."

It was the cry of Jane.

Unable longer to endure the cunning torture of the tithing-man, or to control her fears, she had leapt to her feet. She rushed forward to the middle of the floor, and held out imploring arms towards Tamsin.

The courage of Thomasine had wavered at the mention of the banns, but her heart grew firm at

this terrified appeal of her mother's despair. She dared not let the constable go. If the banns must be called—they must. Philip had promised to save her. And Philip had clearly told her to promise if she must.

"Will—will that settle everything?" she stammered.

The constable saw that he had won and came back into the room. Soft as a cat's paw with a kitten, gently persuasive and clearly explanatory, he went on talking to Thomasine.

"Everything, Tamsin, my dear. There's not a soul outside this room can ever get hint o' what's gone an' past. Say the word. 'Tis dead and buried. Dead an' buried, did I say? It never was born. 'Tis nothing. Melted like a smoke. Gone like a dream.'

Then his crafty mind saw the chance to snap up one more small advantage, and whilst continuing to talk to Tamsin, he turned his head towards John Scutt.

"Though, to be sure, your father would only wish to lay down the forty shillings apiece—the mere value that he his own self put upon the sheep. Always a honest man, sure, your father would be the first to wish to pay for his mistake. Then all's done and settled."

"I consent," murmured Thomasine.

John Scutt quickly drew a bag from his pocket and counted four sovereigns on to the table. It was

quite wonderful to see the dapper way in which the constable stepped forward and transferred them to his own.

"Now then, John Scutt, is the time for a drop out o' your bottle. Come, come, Isaac. Get up an' gie your young woman a kiss. Then all drink health to the young couple. Then off to the passonage. Passons be birds do roost early—some o' 'em at least. Hark! What's that?"

Something had certainly moved behind the high-backed settle.

In a corner of the kitchen in the recess formed by the projecting chimney-breast, a large cupboard had been made by the addition of a door. That door had creaked.

Then with a quick step an unsuspected listener walked out into the open room.

"You scoundrels!" cried a voice.

The men all leapt to their feet and stood aghast.

" Master Philip!"

CHAPTER V

DISCOMFITURE

Bewilderment fell on everybody present.

At the appearance of Master Philip all the men knew that the matter was now by no means settled; but not one of them realized at once the importance of this sudden intervention of a reliable, disinterested, well-instructed witness of the whole proceedings.

"Scoundrels!" cried Philip louder than before.

At this repeated insult the young Isaac, his fists clenched, advanced towards Philip. In any moment of doubt that was his argument, and it often proved sufficient. But old Isaac nimbly stepped in front of his son.

"Stand back, you fool," said he in a hoarse whisper. "Keep the law wi' a lawyer, or you'll come off worst."

John Scutt, a fist resting on the table, stood frowning. He knew that Tamsin must have told her lover, but the end of that he could not foresee. As to Jane, after her scream of "Master Philip!" she sank back again into the corner. The coming of Philip to her was a romance. In her mind Master Philip, beside himself at being parted from Tamsin, had crept into the house in order to see

her once more. But all her plans were broken. All her schemes were now of no avail. All her hopes were gone. She threw her apron over her head in shame of all that Master Philip must have heard.

The little tithing-man was the first to recover his self-possession. Master Philip was the lover of Tamsin. He had no doubt that he had been completely outwitted by the superior cunning of John Scutt, advised by Master Philip. He saw quite clearly that the game was up. But old Isaac was not easily put out of countenance.

"So ho!" cried he, making as if to go. "A plot, then! An' a very mean plot, too, I do call it. Come on, Isaac. There'll be no need to trouble passon. 'Tis the Justice we must visit. 'Tis a

warrant we shall want-"

With such loud talk as this he thought to be implored, or it might be even paid, to keep a still tongue, and so to get out of the house with some show of bravery, and hear no more of a matter which, if known, might get him into trouble as a tithing-man and make him the laughing-stock of the whole country-side.

Master Philip stepped between him and the door. Then there is something to be got, was the imme-

diate thought of Cledworth.

But Master Philip took a most unexpected and astounding view of the proceedings.

"You're quite right, Cledworth," said he calmly.

"You've no time to lose waiting about here, drinking the brandy of the man you ought to be apprehending. After forty-eight hours it will look none too well. But I'll walk along with you and lay my information at the same time. Then you and Isaac and John Scutt can stand your trial at the same assize."

"I and Isaac?"

"Certainly."

"What for?"

"You do not suppose that any gentleman on earth would stand in with you rascals in such an infamous deal as this, do you? You can call me as a witness, as well as Isaac, as to Scutt offering you money. And you have put his money in your pocket, mind that. I can call Miss Scutt against you. Come along."

"But what's it all about?" gasped Isaac, for he

felt he was out of his depth.

"Why, Scutt's robbing the common, and you and Isaac condoning the felony. And you a tithing-man! The doings of Eddyford will be making quite a stir in court next spring. There will be pleasant reading for the parish. Come along. Eddyford seems likely to lose sight for a time of a few most important parishioners, if I know anything about it. Or if you would rather not have company, we can go apart."

Old Isaac narrowly scanned the face of Master

Philip.

He had known him all his boyhood as a merry, good-humoured youth, but now his features were as hard and stern as a county-court judge, with whom old Isaac had once made acquaintance in respect of a warranty of a horse. He knew nothing but gossip about Master Philip and Tamsin. He did not believe in any serious courtship. The lip of the tithing-man quivered. He was not sure that a gentleman, like Master Philip, might not feel in honour bound to expose a crime against the common. At the same time a doubt arose in his minda doubt of considerable weight—as to whether a young lawyer, with his way in the world to make, might not expect to derive advantages from cases carried into court. He wavered between fear of integrity and a deeply rooted belief in universal guile. Yet how did Master Philip get there? Somebody must have told him. Had John Scutt been in to consult the old lawyer Marshall? He had been to Netherton for certain. Old Isaac glanced at John Scutt's face, so gloomy and perplexed, then at the back of Jane's apron, but found no consolation.

"Come along, Cledworth."

By a flash of genius the old Isaac perceived that his only safe plan was to stand by neighbour Scutt. He was as full of wiles as a fox. Never long without a resource, even though a poor one, his tongue, once wound up, would run as long as an eight-day clock.

"Bless my heart, Master Philip, how black you do look. Felony! What felony? There's no felony. An' can be no condonation without. Pack o' nonsense! Well, now, 'tis too bad-so 'tis. You ought to know me by this time. All the years I've a-kep' my own parish church to Eddyford. An' poor old passon, your very own father, kirsened all the one an' twenty, an' prepared for confirmation, Isaac there an' all. I take it very much amiss o' you, Master Philip, I do. For I did but come to take the money for a couple o' sheep that neighbour Scutt picked up by mistake. Didn' I, Isaac? I don't blame neighbour, come to think o' it. They was very slovenly marked, I own that. Wadden 'em, Isaac? Two I bought an' marked wi' a brush, an' the tar had a-runned down from the brush, or wi' the heat o' the sun. Hadn' it. Isaac? An' turned the C into a sort of a S like. Didn' it, Isaac? An' you can come roun' to my place an' see 'em if you be a-minded. An' as to neighbour killing by night, 'tis well known why. He do kill when Tamsin do go to Netherton-town-because Tamsin, being so delicate, is so nice in her mind, she can't ate the meat if she have a-cast eyes on the carcase. All the parish do know that. Don't 'em, Isaac?"

In admiration of such stupendous ingenuity

John Scutt looked up.

Jane quickly uncovered her head and stared.

"But the ponies," interposed Philip in Cledworth's own words and manner.

"Say no more. Now, there, Master Philip, I must an' will own I was wrong. Isaac an' myself, I being the tithing-man, do often look roun' a bit. 'Tis nothing but right. An' I said, 'Isaac, you be crazy wi' love for Tamsin Scutt, an' though she's no worker-an' to my mind no good for a farmer's wife-an' a lot too proud in her ways for any wise man, you'll be no good for victuals nor work till you do know your fate like. We'll take the opportunity to step into Hatchbarrow an' speak. Now to see John Scutt bring in suckers as he did, did rouse a fair suspicion like. Didn' it, Isaac? An' we thought nothing but right to take they suckers in the name o' the law. We took 'em up on common for the mares to own 'em. Sure enough the little mares runned to 'em, pretty quick. They did. No fear. Oh! They owned 'em every one an' gied suck. But look-y-'see, 'twas John Scutt's own little mares, every mare o' 'em, with the S plain marked on her rump. Oh no! There's no felony, Master Philip. An' that cleared up in our minds about the sheep."

Master Philip grew more than ever impatient.

"To use your own words, why talk and explain so much, Cledworth? I am not the jury."

But the old Isaac was not again to be put out of countenance. His own words, as he poured them out so glibly and without premeditation, had convinced him beyond a doubt of the security of his position.

"What good to talk about a jury, Master Philip?

There's no evidence. You can't have law without evidence. What wi' the fluster o' the little mares, the suckers got away. We couldn' catch 'em, mares or suckers, do what we would. They be loose. We felt wonderful shy to come back an' face John Scutt. I said so at the time. Didn' I, Isaac? An' Isaac up an' said, 'Look here, father! They hooked you up to crook-why!' Bless my heart! You was here back sheep-shearing, Master Philip! So you was. Maybe you had a-went first through—anyway, they hooked I up to crook there, up to that very self-same beam, a-tied up in a sack-bag. Why, the flour idden out o' my best suit yet-well, my second best then. An' Isaac said, 'Let's say I must wed wi' Tamsin to set all straight.' An' that's the prank you heard, Master Philip. Idden it, Isaac? Too bad, I own, for it brought tears. I own it. Still, Master Philip, you must know your own self, there's no standing ground for law without evidence, an' that's the true explanation-"

"Will you swear that?" asked Master Philip.

The question was most ironical, but Cledworth did not appear to mind.

"Take my oath o' it. Why not? So can

Isaac too, for certain sure."

"You scoundrels!" said Philip for the third time.

In great haste the old Isaac pounced upon his hat and stick.

"Come, Isaac. This is no place for we. I take no such words from any man, gentle or simple. I've told the truth and I've owned myself wrong. So no need for names. It is not the way of a gentleman. I sha'n't stay here to be called 'em. Not a minute. No. Not a minute. For you are not the gentleman, Master Philip, that your father was. Come, Isaac. Over nothing but a harmless joke, too. An' when a man has spoken out and owned himself wrong—"

Deeply injured, the old Isaac Cledworth departed in haste. With impressive dignity and a great show of self-respect, both he and his son passed out of sight and hearing beyond the walls of Hatch-

barrow.

CHAPTER VI

HUMILIATION

John Scutt drew a deep breath.

He was not such a fool as to suppose that the falsehoods of old Isaac could have found any acceptance whatever in the mind of Master Philip. He stood there no better than a convicted thief, knew it, and was ashamed of it. But it was a relief to know himself beyond danger of the law.

Jane rose from her seat. In this mizmaze of surprises she was lost. She pressed her hands upon her forehead trying to collect her scattered thoughts. It was no good. They evaded her. They were all in conflict and upset each other. As one came another fled. Her bewildered brain could grasp nothing clearly. Presently, driven by the housewife's instinct, since it must be drawing near to supper time, and Master Philip had made a journey, and Master Philip must be wanting something to eat, she went to the dresser and began aimlessly setting plates upon the table board.

"Sit down, Master Philip," said John Scutt, and pushed forward a chair. He was very quiet, very crestfallen, very humble. It was an invitation

to a conversation.

"No, Scutt. I can't sit down, thank you."

To the lover of Tamsin the owner of Hatch-barrow had been Mr. Scutt. He noted the change. But the manner of Master Philip was so sad, that it was hard to tell whether he spoke in pity or to a man of inferior position. Besides, John Scutt had always been Scutt to the Piltons when they lived at Eddyford.

"Our Tamsin told her mother about your com-

ing-" began Scutt, and stopped-

Master Philip was not there. He had gone to the cupboard and came back bringing his hat and whip.

John Scutt tried again.

"Yes. Our Tamsin, as I was saying, told her mother and—and—mentioned about Court. Master Philip, 'tis the best of land. You could do well at Court."

But Master Philip gave no answer. He was paying no attention whatever, for he had laid his hand on Thomasine's shoulder and was whispering something in her ear. Ah! Then he would not forsake Tamsin, cold and distant as he might be to her father. John Scutt found thus much consolation in this neglect of himself and began to excuse himself.

"You mustn't think too much of a sheep or two, Master Philip. A man must pick up a few now and again to get his own back. Otherwise he'd soon come to ruin. If every neighbour was in jail who has picked up a sheep in a sea-fog, there'd be neither Cledworths nor anybody else but the women-folk

in church of a Sunday."

"There is no defence," replied Master Philip coldly. Then, looking upon the changed bearing of the man whom he had always respected, he could not forbear a lament. "And I took John Scutt to be as honest a man as I know."

The owner of Hatchbarrow had lost his sharp, decisive manner. He began to plead with the humility of a man who has seen better days and fallen into misfortune.

"It can never be known, Master Philip," he whispered eagerly. "The Cledworths can never open their mouths."

"You know it. I know it. If we all know it ourselves, is not that enough?" asked Master

Philip dryly.

"'Tis no fault o' our Tamsin's. We should have done no wrong, not so much as a penny-piece, if we had gone always according to her mind. All our doings might be open as the day then. I wouldn' have her to suffer so much as one sigh. You marry our Tamsin, Master Philip. Marry her. She's good as gold an' better. I give Hatchbarrow to Tamsin free the day of her marriage."

"I cannot possibly make terms with you, Scutt. If you think of it, you must recognize

that," replied Master Philip.

"You take Court, sir. You'll have both Court

and Hatchbarrow. 'Tis a holding for a gentleman. Twice as much as your father had. You do love hunting. You will be able to hunt as much as you like."

Master Philip shook his head.

"Or I'll give Hatchbarrow to our Tamsin and rent it of you if you like that better. Or I'll take Court. You can live in which house you like best, Master Philip! Don't go, sir. To the day o' my death, I'll be your man for no more than a living, sooner than Tamsin should be hurt. Both Jane and I will work for 'ee both—for a roof, an' clothes an' keep. We can't want no more. What good could more do us? For a roof, an' clothes an' keep, Master Philip, till we do drop of old age, Master Philip—Master Philip—"

It was not Master Philip who had moved. Thomasine had risen from her chair. To hear her father—he! who had never been anything but masterful and self-assertive to any but herself—begging to be nobody, willing to part with everything, after his years of hard work and hard dealing, filled her heart with deep pity. His humiliation, when he slunk away from her in the barton, haunted her memory. Then she saw the wreck of all that her imagination and affection had pictured him to be. Now her soul perceived only his love for her and his contrition. Hopeless and broken-hearted, by no fault of her own, she saw him conscience-stricken and broken-spirited by self-reproach.

Thomasine loved her father. They had always loved each other—not with sentiment and caresses, for his rugged nature did not ask for them, but with unspoken, unwavering affection. He had sinned for love of her. Moved by an impulse of infinite pity, she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck.

"Don't, father," she sobbed. "You do not understand"

Still less did John Scutt understand, but continued more eagerly.

"There's all the stock, Master Philip. I never afore in my life had such a clean handsome lot o' stock nor so much. An' the best harvest for twenty year. There a stack o' wheat more than ever was, the best year ever known. All——"

But Master Philip had turned away and was paying no heed.

"Come and speak to me, Thomasine. Come at least to say 'Good-bye.'"

Thomasine was still clinging to her father-

"Come, Thomasine."

And Jane came from her plates and the table that was never to be laid, and, whilst timidly stroking Tamsin's arm, added in her ear a word of counsel.

"Go an' talk to Master Philip, chile. Sure he do deserve our thanks."

Good-bye! Good-bye! indeed!

It was the hardest trial of all, but it must be done.

Thomasine yielded to her mother's touch and left her father. Philip laid his hand upon her arm, and together they went out into the clear starlight and the cold wind, and closed the door behind them.

CHAPTER VII

ONCE MORE THE HEARTH

John and Jane sat down before the hearth as they did on the night of the sheep-shearing, when they first knew that Hatchbarrow was bought.

Jane moaned and uttered disconnected thoughts. Not intentionally for the ear of John, but because

they would be uttered.

"Ah! We've a-ruined all. Wicked sinners that we be! Th' Almighty put it all in reach o' the labour of our hands—every bit an' crumb, just to our wish an' liking—but we ourselves have a-dashed it to the ground. We must have Hatchbarrow for our own. No matter how. An' Hatchbarrow we've a-got—an' a bellyful o' trouble all the same. What did I tell 'ee, John? Our Tamsin is a maid to die for love. I have a-said it. An' I do know it. Ah! Wear the willow! Master Philip'll never wed wi' her now. Wear the willow—pine an' die. I can see it clear."

With Jane alone, John found his old self.

"So clear as a owl in the daylight," he said roughly. "Master Philip is a man, an' I don't doubt a man of his word. He'd marry our Tamsin. 'Tis we an' ours that he won't touch o'. 'Tis

our Tamsin is going to say 'No' to he. Words won't change her. What her mind do find right

she'll do. 'Tis good-bye for Master Philip.''

"'Tis good-bye all, to my mind, all we ever hoped for. All our wishes, John, all flowered. Every one o' 'em kerned—every one o' 'em riped and in the end every one 'o 'em have a-slipped shell, like nuts in the wind. An' our Tamsin do love un—love un like life. She'll take un, John. She'll take un. I do know she'll take un."

"Never. Not in this world."

"But she do love un. An' he'll use words—words o' love. There's words o' love from the tongue of a man, an' a maid in love can't help herself."

"She'll never take un."

"She must! She must!" wailed Jane.

"'Tis as you do say, Jane, Tamsin is so nice in her mind like. She'll see herself soiled by we There's no real, everlasting stain 'pon she."

"There can't! There never can't!" shrieked

Jane.

"But she'll see herself soiled. She'll grieve an' cry, like she did as a chile, do 'ee mind? when she was out to play in barton an' got the dung 'pon her little hands."

"An' none to run to now," moaned Jane. "For, so sure as God's in Heaven, we be the dung. Wicked sinners when all went well. An' we be nothing better 'an dung, John."

She bent forward like one in intense pain, until her face almost touched her knees, and rocked to and fro and wept.

"An' none to run to now," she sighed between her sobs.

Suddenly, as if by an inspiration, she stood upright. She raised her head. Her eyes were fixed upon the great oaken beam, and in a loud voice, Jane prayed.

"Oh! God A'mighty, join 'em. Join 'em, dear

God A'mighty, join 'em. Join 'em one."

And just as hastily, alarmed, ashamed in the presence of John, she sat down again and wept.

For a long time they did not speak, but Jane was the first to break the silence.

"Hark! Here she is."

They listened. It must have been the wind in the chimney, for Tamsin did not come.

"They must be o' one mind, sure," said John in a low voice. "Our Tamsin could never bide so

long, unless they was agreed."

And still the time passed on. They became restless, and within the heart of each of them arose fears too terrible even to mention. Each one thought of going out to look. Each one feared to be the first to speak the thought.

But Tamsin came.

She lifted the latch, almost as if by stealth, and crept in noiselessly and without a word. The traces of her struggle might still be seen upon her

cheeks, and she was pale with the deathlike white of a half-burnt ashen log when the fire has gone out. But Thomasine was self-controlled. She had brought herself to a determination and was calm—so calm, that, with a glance at the half-set table board, she began to occupy herself with household work.

Neither her father nor her mother could summon the courage to ask of Tamsin what had taken place, but Jane's black eyes almost glittered as they watched her eagerly and scanned every

movement.

There was no longer a ring on Tamsin's finger.





EPILOGUE

It was an afternoon towards the middle of November. Looked at from below, the Beacon Head was scarcely visible behind its wreath of cloud. Yet in the morning, soon after light, two people, a middle-aged man and woman, had toiled up the crooked, stony path, and still they waited hour after hour in the dim, comfortless mist.

At times during the day a drizzling rain had fallen, so fine that it was only evident in the beads of moisture that gathered like dew on the old russet-green jacket of the man and the woollen shawl of the woman. Whenever the cloud promised to clear, they climbed to the very summit of the heap of stones that once served as a beacon hearth, knit their brows, and stared intently in the direction of the sea. When the crest of the hill became hopelessly wrapt in mist, and they could see nothing, in very weariness they sat down on the great boulder by the broken post.

"'Tis no good," said the man. "We shall but

get wet to the skin an' cold to the bone."

"We can but stop," sighed the woman.

At rare intervals a gleam of sunlight pierced a way between the clouds and lighted up both hills and sea. Once, for a brief interval, the day became quite clear.

"Maybe 'tis not too late, Jane," said the man,

"if it should but hold bright."

"Maybe," sighed the woman.

More cloud, more mist, more drizzle came drifting

up to cling around the headlands, and everything was lost in haze.

"'Tis going to end in a sea-fog," said the man gloomily.

During the bright intervals there was usually some craft in sight. They knew nothing about ships. Such as became unveiled when the mist lifted they discussed ignorantly, querulously, even angrily.

"There, John, there. Sure now, that must be it." The woman pointed eagerly with her lean brown finger.

"Don't be a fool. She's only for Barnstaple or Bideford. That's—to what we do look for—that's no more 'an a—a walnut shell."

"How do you know?"

"See, can't I?"

"But how can you tell?"

"Got eyes, I s'pose."

The woman was never satisfied that the man knew. Early in the afternoon, at the end of one of their

discussions, a wayfarer came climbing over the hill. They were greatly at odds, and the man had sworn at her for a fool. But the woman could not keep silence. Pointing away over the waters, she made bold to stop the stranger and put him questions in a manner to induce him to answer as she wished.

"Wouldn' that be a very big ship, sir? A ship out o' Bristol, sir? Maybe for America? Can you tell me?"

To see her half wild with eagerness the stranger smiled, but he laughed outright as he looked at the patched brown sail.

"That? That's nothing but some old tub of a coasting schooner," said he.

"What did I say, Jane? Only you can't listen

to sense," said the man roughly.

"But there is a fine ship expected down. I passed a look-out place a mile back. The man was watching for her—a fine clipper ship—her first voyage. He thought, judging by wind and tide, she ought to have been down before this."

"Then she's not passed by unbeknown."

The woman's voice cracked with anxiety, but the man, now as eager as herself, held up his hand to silence her, then pushed her aside and took her place.

"Maybe the fog have a-kept her back?"

"There's no fog to stop her," explained the stranger. "It is clear as noon down below under the clouds that gather around the hill top."

"Then she can't ha' gone by unbeknown," re-

iterated the woman.

"No. He would have seen her."

"Certain sure, must be the one," sighed she, with a sinking of the heart.

"'Tis her first voyage, so he told me. 'The

Bonaventure,' he said was her name---'

"That's she!" cried the man.

"That's she!" echoed the woman. "The Bony—the Bony what, young man? Say it again."

"' The Bonaventure."

"Spell it out," cried the woman.

The stranger spelt it. He was so amused he almost laughed outright, but having no more to tell them, he only smiled, nodded good-day and trudged on his way.

The man seized the woman by the arm, and half led, half pushed her back to the boulder.

"Sit down, Jane. Read out the letter once

again."

Jane fumbled in her pocket, and at last drew forth a letter creased and torn with many readings—in places almost blotted out with contrite tears. The drifting cloud closed over them. The drizzling rain came on again, and cast a mist on her glasses as she slowly read:

"' My dear Mother,

By the time you get this I shall be married to Philip. Nobody knows it. We have not told a soul, or be sure, dear mother, I should have told you instead of letting you believe I was only going for a visit to Netherton-town. We are on our way to be married by licence in a church at Bristol. It is far better so. For in her heart Mrs. Pilton was very much opposed to it, and if Philip had taken a farm, it would not have been pleasant to be so near her.'"

"That's our Tamsin all over," interrupted the man. "There's never a word o' fault wi' we."

"'I shall always love you, dear father and mother, for all the good you have meant for me and the schooling you gave me. We are sailing for America, not to strangers, but to some of Philip's relations. We are going in a new ship called "The Bonaventure," that has never been to sea before, to a new country to make a way for ourselves. We shall pass so near to Hatch-

barrow and yet never see it. That will be on Thursday, not later than noon. We shall know the place by the Beacon Head, and Philip and I shall watch it out of sight. If you and father are there, you will know the ship because there cannot be another on that day so big. With a fair wind, they say, we shall be much earlier. Go up to the top and wish us well until we see each other again. For I shall come back. Philip says if all goes as well as he hopes, we will come back in five years. And I shall write very soon. I shall always write to you. And I shall be happy, dear mother, very happy, for Philip and I love one another heart and soul. I could not give him up. He would not let me give him up. and I could not ask him to stay, for he was bent on going. So you must forgive me, mother, and be sure I shall come back--' "

Choked with tears, she broke off in her reading. "But she'll be happy," she cried. "She've got her love. Our Tamsin'll be happy."

"Read on," said the man sternly.

"'There is only one thing, dear mother and father, and I do not know how it can be done. I should be so glad if you could make amends. If you could think of some way to give to others until all is fair, you would ease your minds and mine. Try to think of a plan to make everything honest that was wrong. If there is no other way give it to those that want. And when I come back all will be past and gone. And, dear mother,

there is one thing I want you to do for me. Keep my room all ready, with nothing altered; just as if you were looking for me to walk in tomorrow from Netherton-town. For we shall get on, and I shall come, or perhaps if all turns out well here, if you should not any longer be happy at Hatchbarrow, you could come here——"

"Hark!" suddenly interrupted the man.

He had bent his head to listen, for in the dense mist around them it had been no good to stare in the direction of the sea.

"There she is."

The stranger was calling from the distance and pointing over the cliff.

"That's the ship. That's 'The Bonaventure.'"

The rain was still falling upon them, but a rift had broken in the fog, making, as it were, an open window towards the sea, through which they could look upon a stretch of smooth water blue as the hidden sky.

Not more than a mile from the shore, but just emerged from behind a jutting peninsula of cliffs, was a ship with every stitch of canvas spread to the light breeze. The sun shone full upon her, and her maiden sails, bent from a fair wind, were white as the round breasts of a sunlit April cloud. They could see her clearly—glorified both by the sunlight which was hers and the cloud that appeared to encompass her—spars and rigging, even the group of people upon her deck. Although she scarcely seemed to move, a ripple of white foam parted before her bows.

The woman jumped to her feet and stood transfixed as if astonished at the vision. Then tears rushed into her eyes.

The man only said:

"Our Tamsin!"

"But she is happy, as I said. I can see it. In tears she may be—but she's happy—happy at heart."

They stared and stared, until very slowly a dark mass, drifting across the sea, blotted out the window and swallowed the vision up.

The man rose from the boulder, turned away and started homewards.

"Come along, Jane," he said in a voice husky and low. "There's no more. I always said it would end in a sea-fog."

Down the hill, together, yet apart, the man some dozen yards in advance of the woman, they trudged, back to the homestead that came into view as they descended out of the cloud.

The woman cried her thoughts after the man, who said nothing.

"She's gone. Our Tamsin's gone. But she's gone to happiness. We drove her away our own selves. She was the light and soul o' the house. But we drove her away. We be sinners. Sinners both. We be transgressors. All in haste to be rich, we've a-lost an' drove away our soul by our sins. God A'mighty forgie us. Sinners. Sinners we be. An' we drove her away—the light an' the soul. Ah! The joy o' us! She's gone. 'Tis to me as if the soul was fled an' the body not dead. An that's how the house'll be as I do move about to

my work. But she's happy. Happy an' good—she do carry her happiness where she do go—"

At the foot of the hill the man, turning silently away, strode across a field to cut a truss of hay for his stock. "Amends," muttered he. "How can a man bear in mind to make amends? There was none ever missed it."

The hay was sweet and green. It smelt as fragrant as a meadow in June. But the man did not notice it. He could not see how to make amends or how to get free. For the moment he saw nothing before him but discontent with Hatchbarrow, the drudgery of the farm work and the enmity of the Cledworths.

The woman kept on to the house. All the while, in detached sentences, she continued talking to herself.

"Ay, she's gone. Gone to her love-

"Come back, Tamsin, my dear, the light an' the soul o' us. Come back to find all ready—

"Lord help me! There shall never a cobweb

hang the day through-

"I'll sweep un, an' dust un, day by day, wi' my own hands, I will-

"I'll scrub un out 'pon my knees every week o' my life-

"I'll have mason to white un out every lady-day

so reg'lar as rent-

"Be happy, Tamsin, my dear! Ah! you can, for you do carry it in your heart. Come back, Tamsin, my dear. Come back, little soul. You've a-wrote it—you will—an' I know you will—."

And so, not without faith, Jane Scutt disappeared

within Hatchbarrow porch.



